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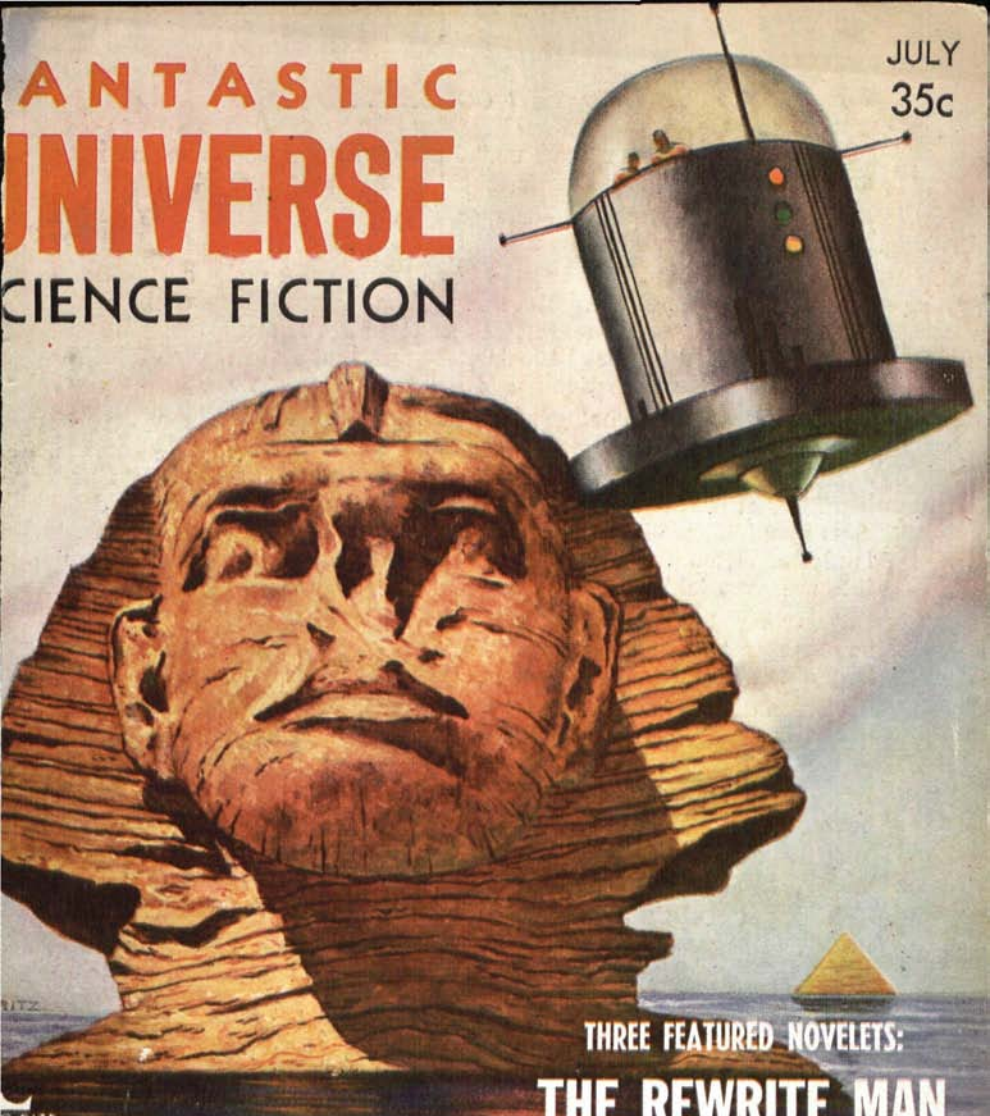

THREE FEATURED NOVELETS:

THE REWRITE MAN
by Ward Moore

FOUNDING FATHERS
by Robert Bloch

THINKING MACHINE
by Raymond F. Jones

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THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

"THEY'RE STILL PRETTY HIGH UP," Jason said. "If we had instruments and could pick up their signals they'd get to us much quicker."

Helen Simmons shaded her eyes. "But darling, we'll surely be rescued now. What could go wrong?"

"A lot of things," Jason told her. "They can't make a landing on the water and the Sphinx could crumble at a touch. It must be highly radio-active. The area just beneath its throat has been glowing steadily for hours. It's a perfect little island—and that's the irony of it. You can't land on a radio-active island and hope to stay alive."

"But *they* could. That gyro-jet has insulated shields."

Jason shook his head. "There are a dozen reasons why they couldn't. Just remember that radio-activity is quite different from ordinary heat. When it reaches a certain degree of intensity all the shields on Earth couldn't wall it out. If they succeeded in landing we'd have to land too. Without insulation we'd be dead before they could carry us into the gyro-jet."

"Darling, I—I can't believe it even now. How could one hydrogen bomb exploded over the Nile Valley cause all this destruction? How long did it take to build the pyramids? How long?"

"I don't know. Each one was built separately." He laughed harshly. "You might as well ask how long it took the Sphinx to elaborate its secret and make it foolproof. I'm inclined to suspect the secret will never be revealed now. And incidentally, it was a *very* large hydrogen bomb."

"I know. I know a lot of things, darling. I know that Julius Caesar once stood here—and Napoleon. Right where we are now."

"Not quite. If they were standing here now they'd be floating around in a watery grave."

"Now you're being morbid."

"It's better to be morbid than hysterical. You've got to fight it, my dearest—every terrible moment of it. They'll get to us. Those lads up there know what they're doing. I wouldn't trade them in for a dozen Caesars or a dozen Napoleons. They're hard-headed realists, aware of their own limitations and not afraid to take risks. They know what modern science can accomplish."

"Caesar didn't know. Wasn't he better off? At least he couldn't blow the Earth apart."

"If he had known—you can be sure he would have tried. That's our only real problem. There are still too many Caesars around."

"Darling, hold me close. I'm frightened."

"No need to be. They'll get to us. We've got to trust them."

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

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Do Unseen Powers Direct Our Lives?

ARE the tales of strange human powers false? Can the mysterious feats performed by the mystics of the Orient be explained away as only illusions? Is there an intangible bond with the universe beyond which draws mankind on? Does a mighty Cosmic intelligence from the reaches of space ebb and flow through the deep recesses of the mind, forming a river of wisdom which can carry men and women to the heights of personal achievement?

Have You Had These Experiences?

. . . that unmistakable feeling that you have taken the wrong course of action, that you have violated some inner, unexpressed, better judgment? The sudden realization that the silent whisperings of self are cautioning you to keep your own counsel — not to speak words on the tip of your tongue in the presence of another. That something which pushes you forward when you hesitate, or restrains you when you are apt to make a wrong move.

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San Jose, California

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, Vol. 5, No. 6. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Avenue, N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, New York, N. Y. The characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. © 1956, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. JULY 1956. PRINTED U. S. A.

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Paul Harvey Hails New Way For Deaf To Hear Clearly Again

NEW YORK CITY (Special)—A sensational new discovery in the miracle science of electronics that helps the hard-of-hearing hear clearly again was hailed by Paul Harvey, famous news commentator, on his American Broadcasting Co. broadcast Sunday night.

Harvey revealed that this new discovery helps even those suffering a severe hearing loss to hear again with unbelievable clearness. It is so revolutionary it makes vacuum-tube hearing aids obsolete. Nothing shows in the ear except a tiny, almost invisible device.

"This new invention changes the lives of the hard-of-hearing overnight," Harvey said. "I've seen it happen to someone I know intimately."

Harvey urged his listeners to find out how this amazing discovery can bring new happiness and success to their loved ones who need better hearing.

To acquaint readers of this magazine with this new way to hear clearly again, a fascinating book with complete facts will be sent free, in a plain wrapper. No cost or obligation. Send your request on a postcard to Electronic Research Director, Dept. B-100, Belton Hearing Aid Co., 1227 Loyola Avenue, Chicago 26, Illinois.

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the thinking machine

by . . . Raymond F. Jones

"Leave everything to me!" the Machine seemed to whisper. "Love and marriage, your daily bread." But there will always be rebels.

THEY GAVE Rick Theron a party before he left.

It wasn't a rational thing to do, or even completely legal. But they were Agros, Sixth Rating, and it was the kind of thing to be expected among their class. The Watch Police knew it was going on, and didn't even bother to validate the report to the regional observatory.

So they darkened the windows in Sol Hanara's house and invited all the people from the neighboring farms — the friends that Rick Theron had known since he was a child—and gave a farewell party. It was a special doings to show the special kind of feeling they had for Rick.

Not that they wouldn't have liked to do the same thing for everyone who went. They would. But it was for Rick that all those accumulated and repressed desires were unloosed.

Rick's father, Sard Theron, drove one of the farm's big cargo planes down from Rillo to Ri-Grand. He got clearance for the flight as a cargo of livestock, but

Like Robert Heinlein and Harry Bates, Raymond F. Jones can point with pride to a major Hollywood production based upon one of his stories, and more science fantasy anthology inclusions over the past seven or eight years than there are blackbirds in an electronic wizard's pie. And now he takes a look at the future as excitingly prophetic as the chill alien face which stared remorselessly out at us from the silver screen in THIS ISLAND EARTH *and left us wondering far into the night how long the human race would survive.*

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even the traffic officials knew that he was picking up a dozen other families from farms along the way. It didn't really matter. The Lonestar Region was among the top producing areas in the country. No one could expect its Agros to be civilized as well.

The big plane rolled to a stop, the last of three bringing guests to the party, and the farm families climbed down to the solid surface of the RiGrand field. They could smell the night-borne scent of the Gulf waters and see the distant shimmering of moonlight on its surface.

Rick had always loved it down here. He'd wished ever since he was a boy that his family could have transferred assignments to a farm nearer the water, but his father preferred the big, open country of Rillo for cattle and roughage crops and the gathering in of a plentiful harvest.

Now Rick was through with both kinds of country. He stood a moment at the foot of the plane stairs sucking the moist Gulf air into his lungs. This was probably the last night he'd ever see this wonderful RiGrand Agro area.

"There he is!"

He heard the sounds of voices and running feet, and saw the shapes of moving figures in the half light. They came up and swarmed over him, slapping him on the back.

"How's it feel to have your farming days over?"

"Hear you're picked to pair with a Mech!"

"You'll get fed and brushed like a prize sire—what a life!"

"They say those Mech women are charged like a parogun. You have to say 'yes'm' and 'no'm' or you're likely to get your head smoked off."

"Lay off it!" Rick roared, half annoyed by the banter that was supposed to be friendly enough but which had the effect of small, hot needles in his skin.

A vacuum of sound swelled outward in the wake of his voice. "Sorry, guys," he said. "I didn't mean it to come out that way. I just don't like it being the last night of my life at RiGrand."

"Sure, we don't like it, either. Guess there's better ways of showing it than being damned fools. Let's go in and have a tall drink."

They crowded around, taking his arms, urging him on. These were the fellows he'd grown up with on the vast farms and ranches of the Lonestar Agro Region. They knew how he felt. Or at least they were trying. Most of them couldn't really know. They'd never leave. They'd spend the rest of their lives here.

For some inconceivable reason the Machine had picked *him* to leave. To pair with a Mech. What kind of breed was that supposed to produce? A Rillo range sire and a salt grass heifer!

He went along into the enormous guest hall of the RiGrand

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ranch. The families left the drinking table and surged about him, shaking his hand and offering congratulations as if something wonderful had happened to him. It was enough to make a man think they *wanted* him to leave.

But he knew how they felt. It was just a part of growing up, to them. Maybe the trouble with him was that he didn't want to grow up.

Mendon Carter, RiGrand's Chief Agro, stood up on the drinking table to propose a toast. His mane of white hair was entangled with points of quivering, silver light. "To Rick Theron!" he cried. "May a thousand Agro sons call him father!"

It wasn't a good toast. Not for a man who was going to pair with a Mech. But Mendon Carter was trying, in the best way he knew how, to supply an expression of their love which Rick would have to remember and sustain him in the years ahead. Until the time, at least, when he would finally all but forget that he had ever been an Agro.

"To Rick!" the others shouted, even more loudly than they intended, in order to cover their embarrassment at Mendon's inept toast.

But Rick pretended there was no cause for discomfort. He leaped to the table beside Mendon and held his glass high. "To my sons!" he cried. "I'll send every one of them back to Lonestar!"

That eased their tension, and gave them license to be as gay as they liked. They answered back with shouts of laughter and good wishes as Rick jumped down from the table, his eyes intent upon the figure he had been searching for ever since he came in.

She was standing against the far wall, her face bright with laughter that pained him. He forced his way through the crowd to Barie's side.

"For a little while I thought you weren't here," he said.

"You knew better than that," Barie answered. "Come on." She took his arm. "The orchestra's going to play. You aren't going to dance with anyone but me tonight. And after tonight you'll never dance with me as long as you live."

She stepped closer and he took her in his arms as the squeaky, tootling orchestra assembled by Mendon Carter at one end of the room took up its beat.

II

IT WASN'T a good orchestra and never would be. It was just some of the farm boys who liked to get together on Saturday nights and beat out a little whimsey. Sometimes it was at RiGrand; sometimes at Rillo or Worth-Dallas. At best it was a five hundred mile round trip, and of course the Watch Police knew all about it. They didn't expect anything better from Agros, Sixth Rating.

They were doing something call-

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ed "The Lass at the Mech-Shake Ball."

Barie bounced happily to its senseless, repetitious rhythm. Rick felt the warm touch and vibration of her body against him, but he couldn't keep time.

"What's the matter?" Barie said finally. "Don't you want to dance with me tonight?"

To everyone but him it seemed like a time for dancing. "I want to get out of here," he said.

He took her out to the patio under the open sky, where the stars were so sweet and clear it made something ache inside a man. They wouldn't look like that anywhere else in the world, even if you roamed the world over.

He stopped with Barie just beyond an arbor, from which they could see the distant sheet of restless water against the horizon. He touched her and drew her close to him. She looked up, smiling, and patted his cheek.

"I don't think you want to go very badly," she said.

"Am I supposed to?"

"It's like growing older every year. You may not want to, but it happens just the same."

"You mean there's nothing we can do when a machine a thousand miles or more from here says one day that Rick Theron is to leave the land he loves and go to a city he never wanted to see and there be paired with a Mech he never wanted to know?"

Barie laughed softly and pressed a little closer to him. "Rick, you talk so silly. I guess that's why I've always liked you. Even the first time we met, when Dad took me with him to Rillo to talk about cattle with your father. I remember I thought I'd never seen a boy who talked like you. I remember how you spoke of the cattle and the land as if they were your very own. You were nine then. Do you remember?"

Didn't she know? Didn't she know he remembered every glimpse he'd ever had of her, every sound her voice had made in his hearing? He gripped her arm tightly in his big, rough hand. His eyes swept the fields and the grassy plain that led down to the sea.

"Is there anything wrong with having and owning something for your very own?" he demanded.

"Who'd want to? You're hurting my arm, Rick."

He released her. "I'd want to," he said. "I'd want some land, some cattle that were mine and couldn't be taken away. Something to love and take pride in."

He turned her so that he could see her eyes by the light from the sky. "You don't know what I'm talking about, even yet, do you?" he said.

Barie shook her head. "I don't understand you, Rick. Sometimes you frighten me with your talk that I can't make any sense out of. Why should you want to *own* something? It already belongs to you. You work the land. You turn

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in its production. You make your living here."

"Except that now I have to go away and never come back again."

"It makes no difference!" Barie cried. "Wherever you go you'll have something to do, something to produce, something that will get you your living. If the Machine says you belong in another place, paired to a certain Mech, then that's right. There's no argument with it. The Machine can think better than any man ever could! You know that's so."

He regarded her for a long moment. Then swiftly he took her into his arms and pressed his mouth hard against hers. She clung to him, answering his yearning. But even in the midst of her embrace he felt a coldness somewhere that was like a little stab of terror in his mind.

He raised his face from hers. "Does the Machine know how to think about love?" he said softly.

"It must." Barie shrugged and straightened in his arms. "It says a certain Mech girl is more right for your arms than I am."

"And don't you *hate* it for saying that?"

"Hate it for knowing more than our poor, stupid brains do? Hate it for being right? Would it make sense if you and I went ahead and made a dreadful mistake that would bring us misery all our lives?"

"Barie, do you really believe that? In your heart—?"

"I think I almost hate *you* when you pretend to be so blind," Barie said. "You know it's true as well as I do."

"Barie—Barie—has it all been so empty? Has it all been meaningless—since that day when I was nine and showed you what land and cattle could really mean to a man?"

He had to turn away to keep her from sensing the sudden, quick sob that welled up from the depths of him. And then she came to him and stroked his long hair with her soft fingers.

"Of course it has not been meaningless and empty," she said. "It's been wonderful. We've been happy. Our childhood has been sweeter because of each other. And now it is time to grow up. Do you want childhood to last forever, Rick?"

He stood looking down at her face—at her long black hair teasing about her shoulders in the soft night wind and her wide dark eyes so full of trust for the world to which they were born that she would not listen even to her own heart.

It added to the smouldering, uncertain hate in his own heart against that same world.

"Is it childishness that we love each other?" he demanded almost roughly.

For a moment the expression of calm acceptance on her face seemed to break. "It must be," she whispered at last, "because no one keeps it. We have everything else; we mustn't expect to keep child-

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hood. And even if we wanted to, what could we do about it?"

"We can go away! Listen to me, Barie. There hasn't been much time to plan, but I've been thinking of this ever since the notification came. Tonight's our chance."

"What are you talking about? Go where?"

"The Machine doesn't do the thinking for the whole world. There are savages it doesn't care about. We could be one with them!"

"How?"

He pointed to the dark shapes of the planes beyond the farmhouse. "I've planned for us to take one of them. We can fill it with spare tanks of fuel and fly it as far south as the Andes. They'd never find us there. They'd never want to!"

She seemed to hesitate a long time, watching the direction of his glance. "How would you get it ready? The escort comes for you in the morning. There isn't time—"

"*They'll* help me load fuel." He nodded toward the farmhouse where the music was thumping ecstatically. "Say you'll go with me, Barie! It's our only chance!"

"All right," she whispered. "If you can get them to help with making the plane ready, I'll go."

III

RICK ALMOST ran from her, bumping into two figures standing at a corner of the house, smoking. It was Len and Sam from his own farm.

"It's not fair," Len complained jokingly, "to spend all your time with Barie. After all, you *are* going to be paired with a Mech in a couple more days!"

"I'm not!" he cried in exultation. "I'm going with Barie. I need your help." In a tumble of words he told them what he planned. "Get a half dozen more guys from inside the house, Sam. Len, you come and help me get started. We'll pump the tanks full and figure out a way to feed them from spare barrels inside the plane. There ought to be enough barrels around the farm."

But neither of the men had moved. "Come on!" he said.

"You can't," said Sam. "You know better, Rick. It isn't right. The Machine's told you what's best. We like you too much to help with a fool thing like this. You and Barie—we like you both too much."

He saw it then, he thought. Sam had always liked Barie. Maybe he figured with Rick out of the way the Machine might give her to him.

"It takes something like this to find out who your friends are," Rick cried. "There are plenty of guys who *will* help me!"

"We're your friends," said Len quietly. But he was gone from hearing.

One by one, or in groups of two or three, they were approached by

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him in the hall or out in the yard. They were appalled by the stupidity of the thing he asked them to do. He was stunned by their repeated refusal.

In panic, he looked about him. There was still dancing in the hall, but it was muted now, and the jumping, frantic rhythm had reduced to a low beat that was more felt than heard. Their eyes were upon him, averting as he stared back in defiant bewilderment.

He had not asked them all, but word had gone around from mouth to ear, until all knew his frantic decision.

He held them in his stare when he had asked his last man, and knew it was futile to ask any longer. He whirled from the room and raced out to the hangars alone.

The night was half gone and he had only until daylight to work, but he had to try. He unreeled the fuel hose and fed it to the partially empty tanks of the plane. While it throbbed with the pump's pulsations, he ransacked the tool and supply sheds for drums to fill the cabin.

He gathered some, but there didn't seem to be nearly enough. What he had he wrestled up the landing stairs and through the doorway. He lashed them down and went searching for more, then came back to change the hose connection on the tanks.

The dancing had ceased inside the house. All the guests, those who were his friends and had known him all his life, came out and stood in silent knots watching his frantic movements silhouetted against the night sky as he tried to prepare the plane alone.

But it was too much of a task. Dawn came, and he hadn't found enough barrels. He hadn't filled those he had, and he hadn't devised the way to feed their contents to the main tanks from inside the plane.

He was licked, but he was still trying when they saw the plane of the Watch Police against the brightening sky, coming to take him to the re-orientation center.

He climbed down in defeat and looked slowly about the ring of sober faces of his friends who had watched and refused to help. "I could have done it," he cried, "if you'd given me a hand. I leave behind no friends at Lonestar—only enemies!"

And then it came to him for the first time, apparently, that Barie could have helped, but she hadn't. He turned to her, in the forefront of the group, and seemed to read in her eyes the thing he had always known was there but didn't dare to admit.

She had known it would be this way. She had never intended going with him.

"You can't keep childhood forever, Rick. I had to show you that," she said. "It was the last good thing I could do for you!"

Six days ago he'd had nothing in his heart but love for the land—

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and for Barie. He'd expected he'd have the right to pair with her. If you were an Agro, you could afford such hopes. The Machine didn't bother Agros too much. It let them pair often with the ones they had chosen themselves.

Only a few were denied it. And fewer still were taken away from the Region altogether, to pair and spend the rest of their lives elsewhere. Rick remembered those who had gone. Stan More, Daly Croden —not more than a couple of dozen since he'd been aware of the kind of world he lived in, and the things that sometimes happened to people.

Now, he was one of them, borne through the sky to an alien land that he had never seen, never wanted to see. It had happened to him.

He watched the unfamiliar landscape through the windows of the plane. A couple of Watch Police were his companions, but they were busy over a game and paid no attention to him. His thoughts remained with the world he was leaving behind.

There was something wrong with it. He had never been able to put his finger on it, but he had always been the odd one, the strange one who didn't fit. He wanted things of his own—in a world where each man could say that all the Earth was his, if he remembered his neighbor could say it too. He didn't believe that the great Machine, which they told him did the thinking for mankind, could think out his own problems as well as he could.

Somehow this wrongness in the world had destroyed Barie. That was the sign by which he knew it was the world and not he who was in error. It could make her stand and say it was right for someone else to take her place in his arms.

Barie—Barie—

It had taken from him every reason for living.

He had no idea what was ahead of him, but in his mind there burned a single decision that would cover anything that came up. He would do everything in his power to obstruct the goals and purposes to which the Machine assigned him. He would break, and destroy, and disobey until they either crushed him or let him go back. And he had never heard of any who went back.

With this decision clearly made, his mind was free to speculate on what he might find. He knew the traditional stories that circulated among the Agros regarding the Mech cities and their vast production centers. He'd heard tales of the monstrous, unthinkable mechanical brain that had finally brought order out of the chaos of human civilization.

The thinking machine, as the Agros called it, had direct control over the life of every human being on the face of the Earth. At birth, a tape of data based on brain and chromosome mapping was filed

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with the central library which fed the machine. Here it was instantly available for optimum meshing with similar data from all other men and women currently alive.

In as much detail as the machine considered necessary then, the subsequent lives of the people were planned. Their station, occupation, matings, permission to reproduce—all of these activities and thousands more, at the machine's option, were precisely dictated and controlled.

Rick was vaguely aware of the history of the changeover from chaos and war to order and peace. It had come about as a natural byproduct of the Second Industrial Revolution. Men had been searching for the answer for all the ages of history, and then suddenly they had it without even looking for it.

Automation. Robots took the place of clerks and mechanics in the factories. Machines could remember ten thousand times as many facts as the most efficient human and apply those facts without error. There was dislocation and unrest, but eventually the economy settled down just as it had in the First Industrial Revolution.

And then the Great Idea that was so obvious and yet so long delayed. Automation in government. Millions of accurate data on tape to determine the need for a new law or change in the old one. No Senator or Representative could hope to match knowledge with such a device. But the one impregnable argument held for many years: This was mere machine calculation. You couldn't depend for lawmaking on an operation in which no judgment was involved. Human beings had to be governed by human beings. There was no other way.

But finally this limitation, too, was overcome. Marcroft's invention of the judgment circuit made it possible to construct a machine capable of duplicating human thought. The chain was complete.

The changeover was almost painless. Automation, conscription, emergency regulation had been with the world so long that it had become the normal way of life. Here at last was a device that could, without error, direct a man's life in the most useful channels, and do it for *all* men on the globe, without favoritism or bias. Here at last was the millennium for which all the prophets and seers had searched.

Only a few, like Rick Theron, felt, burning within them, aching remnants of something that was not satisfied or taken into account by the Machine.

IV

RICK THERON had never been away from the farms before in his life and his first sight of the shining city of Sanlou almost took his breath away and made him forget momentarily his hate and his resolution to defy the Machine. His longing for the fields and ranges,

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the patient cattle and green crops dimmed a trifle. He hadn't known a city could be beautiful, too.

The plane dropped from the sky almost at the base of its outermost tall building. Only then was he aware that the Watch Police had been observing him closely for a long time.

The plane rolled to a stop.

"Okay. This is it, farm-boy," one of them said. "Let's go in and get the manure cleaned off your feet for the last time."

There was no clear impression of what followed immediately—a thousand blurred details of registration, identification, movement through pleasing corridors and rooms, a complete physical examination that included everything but a count of his body cells. Then, at the end of the day, a moment of rest in the chambers of the Orientation Officer to whom he had been assigned.

The man was tall, like Rick. He had lighter hair, but a countenance that was no less rugged, as if he knew what it was to work with his hands under the open sky.

"I'm Jackson," he said. "Bernard Jackson. We're going to work in pretty close association for the next few months, so we might as well take it as easy as possible. I know a few things about you, but I'd like to hear more. And then I'll tell you anything you want to know about your position here. Fair enough?"

Rick found himself liking the man, just as he had the city, in spite of his determination to hate everything which had taken him from the farms.

But caution warned him against confiding fully in Jackson. He told the story of his life, briefly, confining himself to those aspects of it which the man must already know. He said nothing of Barie and his terrible disappointment in losing her.

Even this seemed to be known, however. "There was a girl, wasn't there?" said Jackson. "A girl named Barie?"

Rick hesitated. "Yes — there was."

"How do you feel about parting from her?"

He shrugged and then remembered Barie's own words. "You can't keep childhood forever."

He repeated them, convinced that he was saying the right thing. The Orientation Officer nodded and smiled. "Sometimes we have a little trouble over such situations and corrective steps are necessary. Apparently none will be needed in your case.

He looked directly at Rick.

"As to your own situation now—the Machine has discovered an extraordinary combination of potential abilities in you, and has been able to match them in a very desirable counterpart with whom you will be paired.

"You must understand that we are not wholly unhuman and mechanical about all of this. You will

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be properly introduced and given adequate opportunity to become well acquainted. We have special areas set aside for these courtship preliminaries. Whenever you find it mutually agreeable an official sanction is given to your pairing and you are then ready for the next step of preparation for your place in our society. The getting acquainted period usually takes about two to three weeks."

"What if it doesn't become mutually agreeable?" Rick asked impulsively and wished immediately that he'd held his tongue.

Bernard Jackson was not disturbed by the question, however. He merely smiled. "That just doesn't happen. The Machine doesn't make mistakes."

Rick managed to get a good night's sleep in spite of the experiences of the day. A long time later he reminded himself that his ability to sleep had been a very fortunate thing, too—considering all that was to follow during the next twenty-four hours.

He was introduced to Deva Warel, the woman with whom he was scheduled to pair, at noon the following morning.

Bernard Jackson brought them together for lunch. She was seated at a table near the window of the dining room in the Orientation Building. With her was Jackson's counterpart, a female Orientation Officer, who seemed unhappy about the whole arrangement.

Jackson pointed her out ahead of time, as they came into the room. "That's her, sitting right over there," he said.

Rick looked. For a moment he seemed to be staring at a small, golden sunburst. Then it turned into the reddest head of hair he had ever seen or imagined.

"That's Deva? The one with the red hair?"

"In the flesh."

He knew at once that the Machine's traditional infallibility was sheer idiocy. This girl was as unlike Barie as it was possible for a woman to be, and on her face, as she caught sight of him and turned, was a look of total, unadulterated antagonism.

"She has the highest potential value of any Mech designer we have discovered for many years," Jackson whispered as they approached. "So you see, you are being entrusted with a very valuable property," he added, with a smile Rick didn't understand at all.

Introductions were quickly completed. The name of Deva's companion was Flora Johns. She nodded politely, but Deva was openly contemptuous. Inside himself, Rick felt like laughing. It occurred to him that the machine must give out a good many solutions that human beings found difficult to assimilate. This, certainly, was going to be one of the most indigestible on record. In a way, he and Deva were going to be partners after all.

As soon as the painful meal was over, Jackson cleared his throat. "I

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presume you have carefully explained the preliminaries to Miss Warel, Dr. Johns?"

"I've explained nothing!" the woman officer snapped. "Deva Warel states that she absolutely refuses to go through with this arrangement. She had already committed herself to a companion in the University."

"That's extremely unfortunate," Bernard Jackson said. "However, in all fairness to my ward, I believe we should go ahead in conformity with established custom."

"You young people," he said, "will be assigned quarters in the orientation area. Every opportunity will be offered you to become acquainted and acquire mutual interests. Should this—ah, determination of Miss Warel's not be overcome we shall consult the Machine for other arrangements. But let us have a fair trial and see what comes of it."

V

FOR THREE DAYS Rick remained in his room without leaving it, except for the brief periods he spent in the restaurant. He wondered how long they would allow the farce to go on, and what would happen to him after it was over.

The fact that Deva Warel was as opposed to the arrangement as he was made it a little easier to bear. But all the humor had gone out of the situation. His heart was sick and empty for all that he had left behind—for the farm, the cattle, even the friends who had refused to help him.

On the fourth day he decided he'd at least have to get out in the open if he was going to preserve his sanity. He left the building and walked out through a large, park-like area enclosed by buildings and masonry walls. He passed occasional couples who were apparently becoming acquainted and "acquiring mutual interests." For the most part they seemed to exhibit a good deal of enthusiasm about the process.

Then he stopped short. A dozen feet away, seated on the grass with a thick book open in her lap, was Deva Warel.

She looked up as he approached and grinned. "Welcome to the bull pen," she said. "I wondered when you were going to come down. Guess I must have really scared you, huh?"

"No, I was just taking my time," he told her. He dropped down beside her on the grass and glanced at the title of the book. *Associative Reflex Circuits of the Memory Package!*

"That's too deep for you, farmboy," she said. "Anyway, since we're here to court, suppose you start courting and get it over with. I've heard they have some real cute customs down on the farm."

"I wouldn't know about that," said Rick slowly. "But ordinarily we use courtesy and kindness to the animals. They're the only creatures

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below an Agro—Sixth Rating, of course."

She looked at him with an expression of regret in her eyes. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way. Or maybe I *did*. I just don't know!" She turned away again, her expression changing to one of anguish. "You couldn't know anything about what this means to me. A week ago I hoped and half-planned to marry a man of my own status—a Mech, First Rating. He's a genius, and we've worked together all our lives."

"I'm told that's what you have to expect in return for the benefits of the Machine's great wisdom. But even an Agro can understand what it means to rebel. I had hopes too—of marrying the woman I loved."

She looked up quickly, her eyes searching his face. "I didn't know. That makes us partners in at least one respect, doesn't it?"

"I guess it does. The question is: What will they do to us for refusing to pair with each other? Will it mean prison, or alteration?"

"I don't really know. It happens so rarely. I don't suppose you'd marry me even to escape imprisonment."

"Not if the future of the whole race depended on it," Rick said fervently. "An Agro Sixth may not have much to be proud of. But he has a great deal of pride, just the same!"

"I thought so," said Deva. "That makes the feeling *completely mutual*."

Abruptly, she got up and moved to a more open spot away from the trees and bushes. She gestured to him to follow her. Irritated, he almost decided to walk back to the building, but his curiosity got the better of him.

"Closer," she said as he approached. "This place is wired for sound in every bush and pebble. They're watching us from observation posts on the walls and in the buildings—and they are taking continuous pictures. They're interested in the progress of our courtship, you see."

Rick straightened in sudden anger. The whole ordeal was becoming more disgusting by the minute.

"No, be careful!" Deva said. She put her hands up and drew his head closer to her. "Pretend you are whispering endearments in my ear," she said. "Keep your face down so they can't get your lips on the film. They won't be able to read your words then."

He did as she advised. She turned her face downward, too, and plucked idly at blades of grass as if they were exchanging only words of love and discussing the most blissful of futures.

"We've a chance to get away," Deva said, "if you have the courage to risk it."

"I've already made one try," Rick told her. "It failed because I didn't prepare far enough ahead." He

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described his desperate, last-minute attempt to get the plane ready.

Deva looked up in surprise, and then quickly lowered her head again. "You're a bigger boy than I thought," she said. "Gerald wouldn't take the chance either. He had that much in common with Barie."

"Gerald?"

"The man I worked with and loved."

Rick looked at her. "Where did you want to go?" he asked. "Tell me, Deva."

"There are ten thousand square miles of open country outside the cities. They aren't patroled very well, because the Machine doesn't consider the area a vital factor. You'd be surprised how many have escaped and are living in perfect freedom between the cities. Gerald and I could have joined them if he had possessed the nerve—and had loved me enough."

"Why did he back down?" Rick asked, knowing in advance what her answer would be.

"He said there was no future for us out there. We were civilized citizens of a great community, and had an obligation to do our part. If that obligation included bowing to the superior wisdom of the Machine our only alternative was to obey. Can you imagine a weak-kneed evasion like that from a man who *knows* Mech theory and operation. But of course *you* wouldn't understand how that knowledge should have made him scorn the Machine. Gerald said he had his work to consider."

"It hit pretty hard?" said Rick. "Yes— I can see that it did."

"When he heard I'd been scheduled to pair with an Agro Sixth he acted as if he'd just had a very narrow escape—as if I'd suddenly become unclean. I'd loved him since I was a little girl. But I could have killed him then."

"You'd take him back, though—if you had the chance?"

Deva nodded. "I'd be fool enough to take him back in a minute if he had the courage to go with me."

"But he hasn't," Rick said, thinking of Barie. "And you haven't answered my first question. Just what do we do?"

"*We* can go out there," Deva said fiercely. "We can help each other escape from the city. After that, we can split up and go our separate ways. I haven't quite figured out what I'll do with the rest of my life. But I'd rather be a wilderness outcast than remain chained here, forced to obey every life-denying whim of the Machine."

"Married to an Agro Sixth, of course."

Deva nodded. "Married to an Agro Sixth. Do you know what you'll do? Have you given it serious thought?"

He shook his head, thinking suddenly of all the blank years ahead, without Barie, without home or land or friends. But what Deva said was true. Anything would be

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better than a life of blind obedience to the whims of the Machine.

"You don't believe then that the Machine is the infallible god it's supposed to be?" he asked curiously. "I thought all Mechs bowed to it three times upon arising, and before going to bed."

Deva's lips tightened in disgust. "It's a man-made machine, and only a fool would let it dictate his life for him."

"There are a good many fools, apparently."

"Millions of them," Deva agreed.

"Including Gerald?"

"Including both Gerald and Barie," said Deva.

Rick started to protest, then grinned. "I think we'll manage this getaway if it's physically possible. Just what are your plans?"

"Because you're an Agro it will be possible for me to get permission to take you out in the city—away from the bull pen. We'll make several trips, and come back each time. But on the final trip, we'll just keep going."

"Is it that easy?"

"There'll be a search, of course. A search is routine, but it's never very intensive. After that, however, it's a long way to the nearest Outlander post and decent food and shelter. You won't think it's easy when it's over."

"I'm ready to start now," Rick said, pressing her hand.

She shook her head. "No. Our wisest course is to separate now. Tonight there will be a musical show put on for the benefit of all the gay lovers in the bull pen. You'll take me to that."

"Fine. We'll go on our first tour tomorrow?"

"I'll see about the arrangements. You'd better pretend to steal a kiss now—just to make it look real."

Rick complied. After a moment Deva broke away, protesting, with fire in her eyes. "It doesn't have to be *that* real, farmer-boy! You'll behave yourself—or find yourself left here alone."

Rick grinned. "From what you have just told me, you'd have great difficulty in escaping without me. So I don't intend to worry."

Even in the sanctuary of his own apartment Rick forced himself to suppress his excitement over the prospects of immediate escape. From what Deva had said, he was certain that the watch circuits were observing him constantly—here as well as out in the park.

He smiled to himself at the memory of Deva's name for it. The bull pen. Well, what could be more appropriate? He looked down at the strolling couples walking arm-in-arm, as if the whole revolting spectacle had been entirely their idea. In disgust he turned away again. How could men and women make love at the dictates of a machine? What had happened to the human race, anyway?"

At least he had to admire and

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respect Deva. She had courage enough to rebel against the system, despite her certain knowledge that she would lose her place in the only kind of society she knew. And perhaps the price would be death.

Inevitably, his thoughts went back to Barie. He imagined her in a similar position, facing the same kind of challenge. What if the Machine actually should call her up. It could happen!

He went on to imagine her walking down through the gardens and along the flower-scented paths with some man she'd never even seen before, a love choice selected for her by a mindless machine.

The thoughts made him almost physically ill and sharply increased his bitterness.

That night at the entertainment Deva had reassuring news. She had been granted permission to take Rick on extensive tours of the city to acquaint him with the unfamiliar civilization he would soon be expected to embrace as his own. This orientation preliminary was acceptable as part of their courtship period, since he was an Agro.

"But we'll have to wait another four or five days," Deva said. "They want us to become better acquainted in the gardens where there are not too many other distractions. So just be patient," she said as he frowned wryly. "It won't embitter you for life to endure my company for a few extra days!"

She's right, he thought with a grin as he tucked her arm in his. She was going to be real easy to get along with.

The show was not too bad, he guessed. He'd never seen anything quite like it, but it wouldn't matter if he never repeated the experience, either. His mind refused to remain passive. It lunged about, from considerations of his vague and shadowy future to Lonestar and Barie, and then back to the strange little Mech girl sitting beside him. He wondered what would become of her when once they were safely away into the Outlander country. Had she some secret plan of her own?

During the succeeding days they spent most of their time together discussing with each other their past lives in the widely divergent worlds from which they had come. They spent long, idle hours in the gardens or at the music bar. They ate together and Deva read to Rick poems and stories that opened up a new world of beauty to him.

The time passed more quickly than he could have dreamed. Then on the fifth day Deva said, "Tomorrow we can take a trip through the city. I don't suppose I'll need a leash—"

He laughed and drew her to him and kissed her soundly as had become their custom at parting—solely to impress the watchers who recorded all their actions.

"I told you to behave!" Deva said, how angrily he could only guess.

"Tomorrow," Rick promised.

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VI

IT WAS ALMOST like being let out of jail. The administrator, Bernard Jackson, gave them a few brief instructions and showed them the way out of the building.

"Just a kind of once-over-lightly today," Deva said. "We'll just go along the streets and through some of the shops to give you an idea of what things are like here."

"I'd be a lot more interested in seeing—"

"Hush! General sightseeing is *expected* of us. Do you want to ruin everything?"

He found himself fascinated by the sights and sounds of the city in spite of his reluctant interest. The metropolis was built like a machine itself, with precision-placed masses of pleasant-hued steel and concrete flung against the sky and linked with a lacy network of connecting ways up to the highest levels. There was no darkness or filth or visible deterioration anywhere.

"There was a time when big, massed cities like this were considered failures," Deva said. "It was all the fashion to abandon them, tear them down, and spread the buildings out all over the landscape. That was before we understood the true function of a city. Now we know it can be both a thing of supreme beauty and of maximum efficiency. It's a device for civilized living. But today's model compares with a city before the Atom War in about the same way that a starship compares with the first wooden cartwheels."

"Are you trying to sell me something?" Rick asked.

Deva shook her head. "I'd like to sell it to myself."

"Why can't you?"

"Because of the Machine. It's inexplicable. The Machine actually made possible the cities we have now. And yet because of the Machine I can't bear to live here any longer. It just doesn't make sense!"

"Everybody seems happy enough," Rick said.

And it was true. The people he passed on the street seemed universally content and peaceful—to judge by their expressions. Within a block or two a hundred strangers had smiled and nodded to him. The city was certainly not a place of violent discontent.

"It's me and you!" said Deva bitterly. "Even Barie is happy to conform to the will of the Machine. But you're not. Gerald is glad to be free of me because he's convinced that Utopia has come. And maybe it has! Noone lacks food, shelter, luxuries, aggressive outlets. Nothing is lacking—except whatever is tormenting you and me."

Rick smiled at her outburst. "In the Agro regions you have a chance to become very wise," he said quietly. "There's something lacking, all right—something most people don't even know exists. The love of something that belongs to you alone. You take pride in

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moulding it to a state of perfection. Pride in yourself because you're not *owned*."

"Owned?"

"Of course. All men are property now. Don't you see? They belong to the Machine and can be dispensed and manipulated as the Machine decides through its all-powerful wisdom. A man cannot have pride if he is owned—and by a mere automaton, at that! He can't even experience love, because he hasn't the right to offer himself. He's no longer the proprietor of his own being."

Deva walked slowly beside him, her face sober with thought. "I don't know. That may be the answer. It *would* be strange if it took an Agro to show us what was wrong!"

They walked all day—to the outskirts of the city and back. They stood silently at the edge of the great mass, where the towers dwindled to a thin layer of individual homes. Beyond these stretched the river and the highways leading north and south. Their eyes scanned the distances in silence, each sensing the thoughts of the other, and each saying nothing.

They went more deeply into the heart of the city on the following days. Deva showed Rick the factories and plants that worked in total silence and without attendants, each throwing up a mountain of goods that were automatically inspected, packed and shipped to locations within the city itself or across the continent without a single human voice to guide them.

On the last day she took him to the headquarters of the Machine. These were many tiers of banked memory circuits and blinking lights below the surface of the city itself, in the depths of the solid rock where nothing short of a convulsion of the Earth could disturb the intricate mechanism.

But there wasn't a great deal to see. And the Machine's more intangible aspects were totally foreign to Rick's mind. They stood in the visitors' gallery, behind the impregnable plastic sheets which afforded them a clear view of the mechanisms and the attendants on the other side.

"There is really no such thing as *the* Machine," Deva said. "In reality there are many hundreds of machines. Every city has one. Its storage vaults contain data on each and every resident. It computes upon that data, and its judgment circuits render decisions based upon its final computations.

"Each machine is interconnected with all others in the nation by tremendous microwave cables. A main clearing panel located somewhere in Kansas links the function of all local machines to a central, coordinating unit.

"In addition, there is a world-wide network of interconnections between New York, London, Paris, Rome, and Moscow. It even extends to Africa and the cities of Central Asia. Actually, for in-

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stance, a Mech, First Rating, could be checked out for pairing against a South African native if the Machine so decided. It's never happened as far as I know. But it could happen."

"It's *the* Machine, all right," said Rick bitterly. "I never quite realized before how viciously it has succeeded in wrapping itself around the whole world. You can almost feel it strangling, crushing—"

"Hush!" Deva warned, her fingers tightening in his clasp.

They stood apart from the other visitors to the gallery. But Rick could almost feel invisible eyes and ears ominously recording their every change of expression. He understood Deva's caution.

"There must be some kind of human administration involved in the operation of the Machine," he said more quietly.

Deva nodded. "There is, of course. In the beginning they were the elected representatives of the people—the remnants of the old democratic system." She tried to keep the bitterness out of her voice. "But now that human safeguard doesn't even exist any more. The machine picks its own personnel. The original administrators spent most of their time watching and checking on each other to see that no tampering with the mandates occurred. The Machine decided it could do much better by picking men who would not be tempted to tamper."

The Machine seemed so harmless, with its rows on rows of black panels and glowing tubes and murmuring relays! But it was the enemy. Its very existence had made it forever impossible for him to possess Barie as his own. From every man upon the face of the Earth it had taken something. A desire, a dream, a woman, a treasured possession.

They left the gallery quietly, for they had seen all that they cared to see. They went quickly out and up to the street level and took one of the cars that were freely available to the citizens. Rick glanced at his watch. "It's almost time to get back to the bull pen," he said.

Deva did not reply. Her lips were compressed, and she was staring straight ahead of her.

Rick looked around at the magnificent towers and airy bridges of the city.

"No regrets?" he whispered.

"No," Deva said. "No regrets."

She started the motor of the car, punched the button for the lane and route she desired, and leaned back against the seat with her eyes closed. Swiftly the car moved out into the stream of traffic, and picked up speed.

VII

RICK COULD NOT shake off a chill sense of foreboding as the mass of the city was left behind. It did not seem possible they could so easily escape a monster whose tentacles encircled the earth. Might

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it not even now be watching them through unseen eyes in the walls of the great buildings? When they had gone far enough would it not jerk them back, willing to play a cat-and-mouse game with them until they no longer had energies enough left to continue the fight?

He told himself that he was taking too despairing a view. Deva had lived all her life here, and had been trained as a technical designer of circuits such as those employed by the Machine. She understood its workings, and knew that it could be misled and deceived.

He hoped, too, that someday men would do more than just run away from the Machine. A vague but burning desire had been kindled to activity within him. He would have given his life to be an instrument, no matter how small, in its destruction. But he knew that in his lifetime such a rebellion by the many might well remain only a dream.

He turned his attention to the road as they cleared the advancing edges of the residential section and moved out onto the express highway, heading south.

Deva slowed the car. "We'll be checked at the first automatic station," she said. "The scanners will note that this is a car from the city and record our basic identification. We'll have to abandon the car before then. But that won't be safe, either—until after dark."

His spirits rose as darkness descended and the countryside became more open. The sense of confinement, which had been with him ever since he entered the city, dropped away and he began to feel as free as he had felt during all the years of his childhood in the open country of Lonestar.

"We'll have to turn off soon," said Deva. "Keep on the alert for some kind of trail that might lead down to the river. We'll run the can into the water if we can get it safely down the bank."

A few minutes later, in the glow of the car's headlights, Rick called attention to a sharp turn-off directly ahead. Deva took the controls and in another moment they had come to a halt by the bank of the river.

She directed Rick to get out, and then set the car in motion again. He held his breath as it descended the steep bank. He thought for a moment she had stayed with it too long, but her running figure stumbled to the ground an instant before it struck the water with a resounding splash, and vanished from sight in the swirling dark current.

"Are you hurt?" he called, hastening down the bank.

"My wrist—" she answered in momentary agony. Then, as he reached her side: "I'll be all right. We've got to keep moving as fast as we can."

Her speed and endurance astonished him as they moved through the sheltering brush in the darkness. He wondered how her city

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life could have endowed her with such stamina. But there was little time for questions.

"There's the check station," she said, a few minutes later. "That red light over on the highway about a half mile down. Our best bet would be to get in the water and float past it. They might have detectors out if our absence has been broadcast."

"Can you swim that far in the dark?" he asked.

"We'll find a driftlog—if we can," she said.

They found a suitable log in the next few minutes. They made bundles of their clothes, so that they could be held out of the water and kept dry as long as possible. Then they slipped soundlessly into the cold, muddy waters, pushing the log forward laboriously between them.

They kept silent, paddling slowly through what seemed an eternity of cold and darkness, letting the current do most of the work. Rick tried to estimate the distance they had traveled, but the light of the inspection station was invisible from the level of the water's surface.

At last Deva spoke, her voice thin with cold and anxiety. "This is far enough. I'm sure we must be well past the station."

They climbed out on the bank once more and saw the signal light a satisfying distance behind them. They dried themselves hastily against the chill of the night and donned their clothes, which had remained fairly dry.

"Don't you want to rest for a while?" Rick asked.

"No time for that," Deva said. "We've got to put as much distance as possible between ourselves and that station before daylight. We can find a place to rest and hide all day tomorrow."

As dawn approached, Deva could no longer conceal her fatigue. They had not slowed during the night, but now they began searching for adequate shelter to protect them from observation during the day. They found it at last in a thick cluster of foliage by the river bank. So dense was its canopy of leaves that even the sky was hidden from their sight when they were at rest in its center.

They ate a small quantity of the food concentrate which they had smuggled out, and almost immediately afterwards Deva fell into a deep sleep.

Rick remained awake until the sun was high overhead, keeping an alert lookout for possible pursuit. There was no sign of a hue and cry from any direction. He began to let himself think that they were no longer in any immediate danger. Possibly the Machine and the Watch Police were not even very much concerned about an escape such as theirs. Citizens who wanted to run away were probably considered of very little value to society.

He allowed drowsiness to creep

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upon him as he contemplated his future plans. His first and major obligation was to see Deva to the nearest settlement of the Outlanders at which she wished to stay. Then he'd drift on. No place in particular. Eventually, he supposed, he'd have to throw in with the Outlanders somewhere. But until that day arrived—well, he'd always wanted to see as much of the land as possible.

He thought, too, of Deva. She had remarkable courage and an amazing spirit of independence, he admitted in admiration. He might even find himself missing that fiery mop of hair and equally burning temper. In any event, he owed her a debt of gratitude he could never repay.

He was aware next of darkness and of hands tugging at him in ungentle persistence. Deva's voice whispered impatiently in his ear. "Come on, it's time we were on our way!"

He struggled awake, and snatched up a food concentrate. He munched on it as they made their way cautiously out of the shelter.

"How much farther must we go before we start hitting Outlander settlements?" he asked.

"It's hard to tell," she replied. "They move around. But we should be on the edge of their country by morning."

They moved rapidly through the wilderness again, following the course of the river, but Deva tired more quickly now. She was willing to stop for rest occasionally but not for long. It was approaching dawn when they heard the first faint thread of unfamiliar sound in the air. Deva paused in alarm and glanced up to the sky, listening.

"What is it?" Rick asked.

"I don't know. Wait—yes, I do. They're after us! That's a helicopter, and it's heading straight this way."

Frantically, she raced toward the heavy foliage on the shore. The sound increased and seemed to arrow toward them. They settled in a crouch under the densest cover they could find. But still the sound came on.

Suddenly Deva gasped. "I should have remembered—!"

"Remembered what?"

"Quick!" she urged, grasping his arm. "Into the water!"

Not understanding, Dick stumbled riverward through the brush. "What for?" he asked.

"Infra-red detectors. They're certain to have them. They may be trained on us already. The water may not mask us. But it's our only chance."

They were out of the underbrush now and descending the sloping bank. The sound of the beating vanes was so loud in their ears that it seemed almost upon them.

Suddenly a tiny spurt of light snapped out of the sky. Momentarily it cast a ball of flaming brilliance about Deva. Then she cried out and fell to the ground.

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"I'm hit! Go on, Rick. Into the water. Forget about me—"

VIII

IN HIS OFFICE high in the tower of Orientation Center, Dr. Bernard Jackson put down the report of the Twelfth Sector Watch Police and sighed. He removed his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose, his features haggard with strain.

"Action completed," he said finally to Dr. Flora Johns, who occupied a chair nearby. "Everything went precisely according to schedule. I hope it works out. I liked those two. Remember what he called himself and the girl? A Rillo range sire and a salt grass heifer! I've got an idea he'll change his mind about her before long!"

"I fail to see why it was necessary to order the Police to deliberately shoot her," Flora Johns said with a tartness that verged on bitterness. "She might have been killed. We don't know yet how serious the injury was. The Police aren't that good at shooting a moving target from a plane."

"It was a necessary risk. You know that. You read the Machine's instructions."

"But I don't always believe them!"

"It was necessary because he would have taken her to the first Outlander Settlement, left her there, and gone on his own way. And if he had suggested anything else she would have opposed it.

"It was absolutely necessary to put her in a state of complete dependency on him for a long enough period to enable her to overcome her resistance to his presence. The injury was the only available means."

"So says that idiot Machine!"

Dr. Jackson smiled. "Careful, Flora—even the walls have ears. Or so it is said."

"I don't care! If the Machine was going to drag us in for insubordination it would have happened long ago. Sometimes I wonder just what the devilish thing is up to, anyway!"

"That's something I've been thinking about for a long time," he said slowly. "And I think that with this present case I've been able to figure it out."

"What have you figured out?"

"The Machine has recognized from the beginning that we've asked it for more than it could deliver. We've always assumed that we had succeeded in creating a Machine that could think like a man. We forgot there are two answers to the problem of creating equal thinking in men and machines.

"We haven't built a Machine that thinks like a man. Instead, we've developed a generation of men that think like machines!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Just that. We've leveled men and machines to the same category, but not by raising machine thinking. We've done it by lowering

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men. So today we have thinking machines, all right. Millions of them. All over the globe. We call them men!"

"The Machine has its judgment circuits—"

"Fortunately, yes. And this gives it just sufficient ability to recognize its own failure—and wisdom enough to turn the problem back where it belongs.

"What essential difference there is between true human thought, and the kind of thought we've developed in the Machine, I don't know. And I don't think the Machine knows. But it's throwing the problem back to the only possible source of solution: human beings. Don't you see?"

Dr. Flora Johns was staring through the windows of the tower to the glistening city beyond. "If only you were right!" she whispered.

"I have to be right!" Dr. Jackson exclaimed. "It's the only possible answer. If it weren't, you and I would have been ordered drawn and quartered long ago. But the Machine picked us—and scores of others like us.

"It keeps us in our present positions and gives out wholly insane instructions—by accepted understanding of its purposes. It gives out pairings like this one we've just handled. And provides a clear path for their escape to the Outlander settlements, and insures that they will stay together in spite of themselves. I tell you the Machine is bent on seeing that we somehow rectify our own mistakes and make men out of those millions of thinking machines that inhabit the world!"

"But to what purpose?" Flora Johns cried. "We'll be going back to the chaos from which we escaped by the very creation of the Machine. It has showed us how to insure peace, prosperity, happiness. We've got the perfection of society that men struggled for thousands of years to obtain!"

Dr. Jackson shook his head.

"No. What we *have* got isn't it. We may have come close, but for all practical purposes we've run up a blind alley. We can thank whatever Providence is watching over us that the Machine has been capable of recognizing that fact.

"Our failure is in turning over final thought and judgment to something outside ourselves. Until we are able to take the responsibility and work out answers with our own personal gray matter, we have not solved the problem. Certainly, our existing solution is a failure.

"Maybe a definite, positive solution is unobtainable. Perhaps the only answer is in the continued searching for an answer. I don't know, and I feel certain the Machine doesn't know. But it's trying to develop a sector of humanity that might be able to find out!"

"It sounds right," Flora Johns whispered again, and now her eyes were aglow. "It *has* to be right!"

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A FULL HARVEST season had come and gone, and Rick Theron had stayed with the Outlanders far longer than he had at first had any intention of doing. Deva was on her feet again. She had a little limp, but it had been a long time since her injury had kept her from running and working with the strongest of the Outlander women.

It was time to be moving on.

Yet, as Rick saw her coming from the cabin he'd helped build for her, something caught again deep in the middle of his chest. He wondered what the day would be like that denied him the sight of that red crest of hair, tumbled by the wind, or bound in tender curls.

He moved toward her resolutely.

"You're on your way?" she asked.

"Deva," he said. "I've been doing some thinking. We don't know yet where we're going to end up, and you and I haven't got any better friends out here than each other. We've made out pretty good so far. Why don't we just kind of stick together and see what comes of it?"

She looked at him almost shyly, with a slow smile starting at the corners of her mouth. "I was just about to suggest the same thing," she said.

"You think it could be that the Machine was right about us, after all?"

"It might be wise not to be hasty in going against it," Deva said.

He reached for her suddenly and gathered her into his arms and kissed her long, and passionately.

"Yes," she said. "I think I could even learn to like that. In time—and with practice, darling."

SO BRIGHT THE VISION

By CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

The tale of the hunt, whether the quarry be human or alien—or the tale of the search wondrous with a cosmic grail at the end of it—has long been Clifford D. Simak's specialty. And what stories he has woven from the richly-tapestried corridors of an imagination unique in the entire wide range of science fantasy! We doubt if any reader, caught up in the trident-net of his singing prose could ever forget a Clifford Simak City, or the small furry creatures perched on the shoulders of his spaceman voyagers, or his talking dogs and cats. And now he has truly surpassed himself in an epic yarn of machines and humanoid shadows, of Auto Authors and a writer's torment, of Green Shirt and the Wild and Woolies, only he could have made imperishable.

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requiem in granite

by . . . Robert F. Young

Secretly Danny and Gwen knew that the giant was strong enough to rip the mountain to fragments. But—they didn't think he would!

THEY HAD BEEN playing on the plain all afternoon and their games had lured them away from the forest, farther away than they had ever been before. Late in the afternoon they paused to rest and that was when they looked up and saw how close they were to the Hollow Mountains. For a moment they were both too frightened to speak.

Then Danny threw his shoulders back and stood up very straight and said, "I just thought of a new game. A real game. Let's search the mountains for the giant-of-many-voices! Come on! No one's going to stop us!"

At first Gwen was terrified. "You wouldn't dare!" she said.

"I would too! He'll be easy to find. I know, because my father said this morning that it was time for the giant to come out of his cave and sing again."

They stood together in the crisp clean snow of the plain, staring at the honeycombed precipices and the crumbling crags and then higher toward the towering pin-

The imagination of childhood is often deep and dark and silent. Or it can become myth-making in its lightning-swift intuitions, shaping patterns of light and fire, of beauty and terror, in response to some unexplained inner necessity. It is never historical, never objectively realistic. It exists in a sense, completely outside of history. Hence the monuments of a vanished civilization may loom gigantic to it, and assume contours that never were on sea or land. That wonder Robert Young has grasped, and made real to us here.

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nacles rising against the darkening sky.

"Why doesn't he ever sing in summer?" Gwen asked. "Why does he always wait till the first snow?"

"I don't know." Danny's brow was crinkled in childish concentration. "Maybe he doesn't like summer. Maybe he can't sing unless it's cold and the ground is covered with snow. Come on, let's look for him."

"I'm afraid."

"Oh, you're always afraid! I'll look for him alone then."

He started toward the mountains, swaggering a little, his moccasined feet scuffing up diminutive clouds of snow. Gwen stood forlornly on the plain, watching him. A sense of utter aloneness suddenly overcame her—an acute awareness of the emptiness of the mountains, of the desolation of the plain, and the remoteness of the forest.

"Wait for me!" she called.

Danny slowed until she came up to him. "There's nothing to be afraid of," he said reassuringly. He took her hand, clasping her cold fingers between his own. "When he comes out of his cave we'll hide. He's so big and we're so small he'll never even see us."

"But the Warden. Suppose he finds out we were in the Hollow Mountains? He said no one could enter the Hollow Mountains. Not even the lesser wardens. Not even the Great Hunters."

"Are you going to tell him?"

"No."

"Then how is he going to find out?"

She was silent. They walked closely together, their thin shoulders sometimes touching. It was growing colder. Their breaths turned into little frosty clouds and their feet made creaking sounds in the snow. Presently the awesome cliffs of the outlying mountains loomed above them, chalk-white in the last pale rays of the sun.

They made their way through the debris cluttering the feet of the cliffs to the opening of a narrow canyon. There was something grim and terrible about the sheer honeycombed precipices; something macabre about the tiers and tiers of the yawning caves where the original tribe had dwelt long, long ago.

Gwen hung back and Danny had to half drag her over the piles of stones and twisted metal that littered the canyon's floor. Some of the stones had odd markings. Once they dislodged a stone and it tumbled down between the piles, quickly freeing itself of its camouflage of snow. It made Gwen think of a man's face, with its jagged holes for eyes and its lipless travesty of a mouth.

She shuddered and gripped Danny's hand tightly. She remembered with uncomfortable vividness the stories which the lesser wardens told around the dying cook-fires at night.—The stories about the

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original tribe and the wrathful SeeDee. The SeeDee had appeared after the Great Brightness and afflicted the tribe with the Sickness. Then *he* had driven the tribe out of the Hollow Mountains and into the forest.

He had taken the well men and made them wardens, and *he* had taken the almost well men and made them lesser wardens. And then *he* had created the giant-of-many-voices and made him guardian of the Hollow Mountains, so that the tribe would never dare return to them again . . .

They had come to an open place where another canyon crossed the one up which they had been moving. Danny paused, looking around. The silence was almost tangible. It lay heavily upon the mountains, and overflowed the dusk-darkened canyons.

"Let's go back," Gwen said.

"No!" Danny said. But he stood quietly in the cliff shadows as though reluctant to move on.

"What if the Warden misses us?"

"He'll never miss us!"

"Suppose we get lost?"

Danny didn't answer for a moment. He glanced uncomfortably at the impassive cliffs. He looked up at the dark, indifferent sky. He listened to the brooding silence.

"We'll stick to this canyon," he said finally. "Then we can't get lost. Come on."

Gwen accompanied him reluctantly. They continued up the canyon, picking their way through the increasing piles of debris. The temperature fell steadily and the cold began to penetrate their thin deerskins, to creep up through the padded soles of their moccasins. The canyon widened abruptly and the precipices seemed to rise into the sky itself. Tier upon tier of sepulchral cave mouths piled endlessly upward till the merciful dusk hid them from view.

They hurried on. Presently they noticed that the cliffs were dwindling, dropping lower and lower, and receding farther and farther back. After a while they came to a place where there were no cliffs at all, or mountains either: nothing but a vast circular concavity ringed by twisted hills of stone and steel.

The two children stood very still, looking out across the black desolation. Darkness had fallen and they could barely see the farther rim—a jagged line of shattered pinnacles showing vaguely against the first pale radiance of the rising moon.

"The place of the Great Brightness," Gwen whispered.

"I know," Danny breathed. "I—I guess we'd better go back."

"Let's run. I'm scared, Danny."

"There's nothing to be scared of. It's just that—" He paused, trying to keep his own fear from showing in his words. "It's just that the mountains are too big. They're too big, that's all. We

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could never find the giant. Not even in a thousand years."

They began to retrace their steps. Behind them the moon rose, bringing the mountains into ghastly relief. The contours of the cliffs subtly changed and the cliffs became pale caricatures with haunted eyes staring emptily from dark honeycombed depths.

The canyon's floor was a bewildering chiaroscuro. The two children slipped and fell, and helped each other up, and slipped and fell again. They began to run. They ran hysterically, scrambling and tumbling over the piles and piles of debris. They did not stop running till they heard the voice of the giant, and they stopped then only because the intensity of their terror transformed them into statuettes.

The voice was all around them. It was not one voice but many voices; and yet it was still one voice, a complex, resonant, magnificent voice that rose and fell on great crests and troughs of sound.

They listened to it, clinging to each other, their faces blue-white with cold and terror. They waited hopelessly for the giant to come striding through the canyons. They listened for the awesome thunder of his footsteps.

The voice created exquisite patterns, formed transient fretworks, wove a quivering skein of sound through canyons and caves, around pinnacles and crags. It rose on great crescendos that overflowed the Hollow Mountains and filled the night itself. It was overwhelming; and it was appallingly beautiful.

The two children waited and waited, but the giant did not appear. They listened for his footsteps and heard nothing but his voice. After a while some of their fright left them and they began to pick their way back through the canyon towards the plain, circumventing the unpremeditated tumuli of the original tribe, stumbling on loose stones that sometimes weren't stones at all but skulls instead.

The plain was pale-white in the moonlight. Hand in hand, they started running across it toward the dark blur of the forest. The voice of the giant-of-many-voices became fainter and fainter as they neared the forest, and their fear faded away. Then a ragged mass of cloud edged across the moon's face, and a shapeless shadow rushed across the plain, engulfing them.

Fear overcame them again, and they ran wildly through the night. When they reached the forest they crept thankfully between the trees. For a long while they lay in the soft snow, resting, and when their breaths returned they climbed into the lower branches, passed swiftly to the upper terraces, and swung off toward the reassuring tree houses of the tribe.

IT BEGAN to snow and the snow came down silently on the plain.

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It fell softly on the naked mountains.

Joy to the world! the voice sang. *Silent night, Holy night— O little town of Bethlehem!*

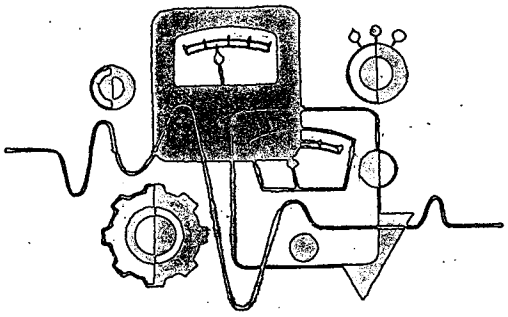
The snow began to cover the mountains. It crowned rivened pinnacles. It piled ever higher on crumbled crags. It filled crevices and softened the littered floors of canyons.

The voice sang on in the thickly falling snow.

Peace on the earth, good will to men—

God rest you merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay . . .

And then the voice faded away, as the ancient public address system, with its thermostatic controls which the dropping temperature had activated, again completed its cycle of recorded carols. And there was nothing left but the snow and the silence. The deep crisp snow and the solemn silence.



DON'T MISS THESE UNUSUAL STORIES FEATURED NEXT MONTH—DRAMATIC HEADLINERS ALL

SO BRIGHT THE VISION by CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

ATTACK FROM WITHIN by BURTON CRANE

THE VOICELESS SENTINELS by ROGER DEE

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT by MANN RUBIN

THE ROBOT CARPENTER by FRANK BRYNING

and many others

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founding fathers

by . . . Robert Bloch

If you're determined to change history nothing can equal a time machine. But be warned! You may prematurely whiten your bones!

EARLY ON THE morning of July 4th, 1776, Thomas Jefferson poked his peruked head into the deserted chamber of what was to be known as Independence Hall and yelled, "Come on, you guys, the coast is clear!"

As he stepped into the big room he was followed by John Hancock, who puffed nervously on a cigarette.

"All right," Jefferson said. "Ditch the butt, will ya? You wanna louse us up, creep?"

"Sorry, boss." Hancock glanced around the place, then addressed a third man who entered behind him. "Dig this," he murmured. "Not an ashtray in the joint. What kind of a setup we got here anyway, Nunzio?"

The third man scowled. "Don't call me Nunzio," he growled. "The name's Charles Thomson, remember?"

"Okay, Chuck."

"Charles!" The third man dug John Hancock in the ribs. "Straighten that wig of yours. Ya look like somethin' out of a Boy Scout pageant yet."

We doubt if anyone but Robert Bloch could dissolve what at first appears to be an outrageous distortion of history—the Founding Fathers in gangster roles!—into such a sunburst of dazzling humor that we find ourselves forgiving him almost before we discover that there is nothing to forgive. You see, the opening scene of this hilarious science fantasy isn't really in the least irreverent, for the astounding, turnabout climax sets history by the ears!

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John Hancock shrugged. "Well, whaddya expeck? Guy can't even smoke, and these here britches are so tight I'm scared to sit down in 'em."

Thomas Jefferson turned and confronted him. "You ain't gonna sit down," he said. "All you gotta do is sign and keep your yap shut. Let Ben do the talking, remember?"

"Ben?"

"Benjamin Franklin, schmoe," said Thomas Jefferson.

"Somebody mention my name?" The short fat balding man hurried into the room, carefully adjusting square-lensed spectacles to the bridge of his nose.

"What took you so long?" Thomas Jefferson demanded. "You run into trouble back there?"

"No trouble," Benjamin Franklin replied. "They're out cold, and the gags are holding. It's just these glasses—the lenses distort my vision. I'd forgotten I'd have to wear them."

"Can't you ditch 'em?"

"No. Somebody might get suspicious." Franklin peered at his companions over the tops of the spectacles. "They're likely to get suspicious anyway, if you don't do what I told you." He glanced around the room. "What time is it?"

Thomas Jefferson fumbled with the ruffles at his sleeves and gazed down at the face of his wristwatch. "Seven-thirty," he announced.

"You're sure?"

"Checked it with Western Union."

"Never mind that Western Union talk. And take off that thing—put it in your pocket. It's stuff like that can get us into trouble."

"Trouble" John Hancock groaned. "These here shoes are killin' me. They ain't nearly my size."

"Well wear them and be quiet," Benjamin Franklin told him. "I wish to God you'd remembered to shave, too. Fine thing—the President of the Continental Congress on the most important day of our history, coming in without shaving."

"I forgot. Also they was no place to plug in an electric shaver."

"Well, never mind now. The main thing is just to be quiet and remember what you're supposed to do. Mr. Jefferson, do you have the Declaration?"

Nobody answered. Franklin strode up to the tall man in the peruke. "Jefferson, that's you I'm talking to."

"I forgot." The big man smiled sheepishly.

"You'd better not forget. Now, where is it?"

"Right here in my pocket."

"Well, get it out. We've got to sign right away, before anybody else shows up. I expect they'll start drifting in around eight at the latest."

"Eight?" Jefferson sighed. "Do you mean to tell me they go to work that early here?"

"Our friends in the back room

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looked as if they'd been working all night," Franklin reminded him.

"Ain't they never heard of union hours?"

"No, and don't you mention it, either." Franklin surveyed his companions earnestly. "That goes for all of you. Watch your tongues. We can't afford a slip-up."

"Telling me?" Charles Thomson took the parchment from Thomas Jefferson and unfolded it.

"Careful with that," Franklin warned.

"Pipe down, will ya? I just wanna take a look at it," Thomson replied. "I ain't never seen that there thing." He glanced at the manuscript curiously. "Hey, dig this crazy hanwriting. Its' all lettering, like."

He spread the Declaration on a table and squinted down at it, mumbling aloud.

"'When inna course a human events, it becomes nessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connecked them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate —hey, what kinda double-talk is this, anyway? Whyn't these guys write English, huh?"

"Never mind." Ben Franklin took the parchment from him and strode to a desk. "I'm going to revise it right now." He rummaged around in the drawer, finding fresh parchment and a quill pen. "I'm not up to copying the lettering style, I'm afraid, but I can explain that to the Congress easily enough. I'll tell them that Jefferson here made his last-minute changes in a hurry. The hurry part of it is no lie."

He bent over the blank parchment and studied the Declaration as it rested alongside. "Got to keep the style," he said. "Very important. But the main thing is to add the provisions at the end."

"Provisions?" John Hancock brightened. "We gonna have some grub, hey? I'm starved."

"That can wait," Jefferson snapped. "Now keep still and let the guy work. This is the most important part of the whole caper, understand?"

Then there was silence in the room—silence except for the busy scratching of the quill pen as Benjamin Franklin wrote.

Jefferson stood over his shoulder, nodding from time to time. "Don't forget to put in that part about me being temporary boss," he said. "And stick in that we need a treasurer."

Franklin nodded impatiently. "I've got it all down here," he answered. "Nothing to worry about."

"Think they'll sign?"

"Sure they'll sign. It's only logical. Right after the part about being free and independent states there should be a mention of a temporary governing arrangement. They can't object to that. Wonder why it was left out in the first place."

"Search me." Jefferson shrugged. "How would I know?"

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"Well, you're supposed to have written it."

"Oh, yeah, that's right."

Franklin finished, sat back, and poked at Jefferson's chest with his quill. "Cough," he said.

Jefferson coughed.

"Again. Louder."

"What's the big idea?"

"You've got laryngitis," Franklin told him. "A bad case. That's why you're not talking. Anybody asks you any questions, you just cough. Right?"

"Okay. I didn't want to talk anyway."

Franklin gazed at Hancock and Thomson. "You two better sign and disappear. When the gang arrives, you go in the back room and keep an eye on our buddies there. I'll make up some excuse why you're not around—can't take the risk of having you cornered and questioned. Got it?"

The two men nodded. Franklin extended the quill pen. "Here. You two are supposed to sign first." As John Hancock reached for the pen, Franklin chuckled. "Just put your John Hancock right here."

Hancock signed with a flourish. He gave the pen to Charles Thomson.

"Remember, you're the secretary," Franklin said, as Thomson dipped the quill in the inkwell. "What's the matter, that quill too clumsy for you?"

"Sure it's clumsy," Thomson said. "And these clothes are murder. And none of us guys knows how to talk. We can't get away with this, Thinker. We're gonna make mistakes."

Benjamin Franklin stood up. "We're going to make history," he declared. "Just follow orders and everything will be all right." He paused and lifted his hand. "In the immortal words of myself—Benjamin Franklin—we must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately."

II

THEY HAD HUNG together for a long time in Philly—Sammy, Nunzio, Mush and Thinker Tomaszewski. They shoved a little queer, peddled a few decks, but mostly they made book.

It was a nice setup for all of them, particularly since the Thinker came into the deal. The Thinker was a genuine shyster, with a degree and an office and everything, and he fronted for the outfit. The funny part of it was, Thinker Tomaszewski had a regular law practice too, and he could have made a pretty nice piece of change without cutting corners.

But he worked with them for kicks, at first.

"The only way I can explain it," he told them, "is that I don't seem to have a super-ego." Always with the two-dollar words, that was the Thinker.

And it was his two-dollar words that finally got them into trouble. In the beginning, everything was

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fine. Using his law office as a front, he had no difficulty in getting acquainted with a better class of mark—not the two-bucks-on-the-nose working stiff, but heavy bettors. He steered them to Sammy or Nunzio or Mush, and they made a big book.

They made a big buck, too. So big that they just had to place a few bets of their own, with some of the top wheels like Mickey Tarantino. Playing it smart, of course, and working only on inside tips, when they were sure of a horse getting the needle.

Came an afternoon when the needle stuck. And they were stuck for twenty grand. Mickey Tarantino held out his hand and smiled. But the smile vanished when Sammy went to him and said he needed time to pay up.

"Whaddya mean?" Mr. Tarantino had inquired. "You guys are loaded. Look at all the rich suckers you make book with."

"All we got to show for it is markers," Sammy confessed. "It's like your old man's delicatessen. The poor guys pay and the high-class trade puts it on the cuff. You know how those big operators work. Well, it's the same in our line. You can't collect from them."

"You damn well better colleck," Mr. Tarantino advised. "Because you got until tomorrow morning. Or elst you wind up in Plotter's Field, or wherever."

So Sammy went away and called a meeting at Thinker Tomaszewski's office and broke the news.

Thinker had news for them too. "Tarantino isn't the only one who thinks we're rolling in the stuff," he announced. "Uncle Sam is looking down our throats for a little matter of back income taxes."

"Great!" Sammy groaned. "Tarantino's hoods in front of us and the Federal finks behind us. Which way do we turn?"

"I suggest you turn to our clients," Thinker answered. "Call on some of our investors and ask them to redeem their markers."

So Sammy and Nunzio and Mush called. And early that evening they assembled and pooled results.

"Three grand!" Sammy snorted. "Three lousy grand!"

"Is that all?" The Thinker was genuinely mystified. "I should have thought you'd get more than that."

"Sure we got more. Excuses we got, promises we got, brush-offs we got. But here's the moola. Three grand, period."

"How about Cobbett?" Thinker asked.

"Professor Cobbett? He's your baby, isn't he?"

The Thinker nodded. Professor Cobbett was indeed his baby. One of the upper crust.

"What's he into us for?" Sammy demanded.

"About eight, I think."

"Eight and three is eleven. Not so hot. But if we could get it fast, maybe Tarantino would hold off for a while."

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"Let's get it fast," Mush suggested. "Let's go out and see old Cobbett right now."

So they all piled into Sammy's car and went out to see old Cobbett. The Professor had a country place—a nice layout for a man who lived all alone—and he was cordial and pleasant when he greeted the Thinker on the front porch.

He was not quite so cordial or pleasant when he learned what the Thinker wanted, and he was downright inhospitable when the Thinker beckoned and his three companions appeared out of the darkness.

They had to stick their feet in the door and they had to stick their heaters in his ribs.

"No foolin'," Nunzio told him. "We want our loot."

"Oh dear!" said Professor Cobbett, as they marched him backwards into his own parlor. "But I have no money."

"Don't con us," Mush told him. "Look at this joint, all this fancy furniture."

"Mortgaged," the Professor sighed. "Mortgaged to the hilt, and past it."

"What about this here school where you teach at?" Mush asked. "You could maybe brace them for some advance dough on your salary, huh?"

"I am no longer connected with the university."

"What gives here?" Sammy wanted to know.

"Yes," Thinker added. "I thought you were a wealthy man."

The Professor shrugged and ran his hand through his graying hair. "Things are not always what they seem," he said. "For example, I considered you to be a reputable professional man. And when I innocently inquired about the possibilities of placing a small bet on the races, I never dreamed you were associated with these rufflans."

"Watch that talk," Sammy warned. "We ain't no more ruffians than eight grand is a small bet. Now whaddya mean about things ain't always what they seem?"

"Well, it's like this," the Professor answered. "I did have a certain sum of money set aside—yes. And I did have a position of some eminence at the university. The fact that both money and position are gone today can be attributed to one thing—my private research project.

"The cost of experimental models reduced my savings. The revelation of my theories cost me my faculty position. An attempt to raise funds to continue my work led me to the last resort—betting on the races. Now I have nothing."

"You can say that again," Sammy told him. "In about three minutes you're gonna have nothing with lace around it."

"Wait a moment," the Thinker interrupted. "Experimental models, you said. What have you been building?"

"I'll show you, if you like."

"Come on," Sammy ordered.

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"Boys, keep the heaters warm, in case he pulls a funny."

But the Professor didn't pull a funny. He led them downstairs to what had been the basement, and was now an ornate private laboratory. He led them up to the large rectangular metal structure, covered with coils and tubing. It had a vague resemblance to an outhouse designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

"Jeez," Nunzio commented. "Whatchoo doin', buildin' one of them there Frankensteens?"

"I bet it's a space-ship," Mush hazarded. "Was you gonna make a getaway to Mars?"

"Please," the Professor sighed. "You're making sport of me."

"We're making hamburger of you in another minute," Sammy corrected him. "This doojigger ain't no use to us. Couldn't get twenny bucks for it at a junk-yard."

Thinker Tomaszewski shook his head. "Just what is this object, Professor?"

Professor Cobbett blushed. "I hesitate to designate it as such, after the rebuffs I received at the hands of supposed authorities, but there is no other intelligible term for it. It is a time-machine."

"Oof!" Sammy put his hand to his forehead. "And this is what we let get into us for eight grand. A nutty scientist, yet!"

The Thinker frowned at him. "A time-machine, you say? An instrument capable of transporting one forward or backwards in time?"

"Backwards only," the Professor answered. "Forward travel is manifestly impossible, since the future is non-existent. And travel is not the best word. Transit more closely approximates the meaning, insofar as time possesses no material or spatial characteristics, being bound to a three-dimensional universe by the single observable phenomenon which manifests itself as duration. Now if duration is designated as X, and—"

"Shuddup!" Nunzio suggested. "Let's kiss off this joker and scram outta here. We're wastin' time."

"Wasting time." The Thinker nodded. "Professor Cobbett, is this a *working* model?"

"I'm practically positive. It has never been tested. But I can show you formulae which—"

"Never mind that now. Why haven't you tested it?"

"Because I'm not sure of the past. Or rather, our present relationship to it. If any person or object in present time were sent to the past, alterations would occur. What is here now would be absent, and something added to what was there, then. This addition would alter the past. And if the past were altered, then it would not be the *same* past we know." He frowned. "It's hard to state without recourse to symbolic logic."

"You mean you're afraid that by time-travel you'd change the past? Or come out in a different past—a past *made* different *because* you traveled into it?"

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"That's an over-simplification, but you have the general idea."

"Then what good is your work on this?"

"No good, I'm afraid. But I wanted to prove a point. It became an almost monomaniacal obsession. I have no excuses."

"So." Sammy stepped forward. "Thanks for the lecture, but like you say, you got no excuses. And we got no time. This here basement looks like a nice soundproof place for target practice—"

The Thinker grabbed Sammy's arm. "What's the sense?" he asked.

"The guy welshed."

"So he welshed. Will murder change that? Will murder help us now?"

"No." Sammy bit his lip. "But what we gonna do? We got no dough. We got Tarantino after us, and also the govmint. We can't go back to town."

The Thinker looked around. "Why not stay here, then? We're safe, isolated, with a nice big roof over our heads. Let's enjoy the Professor's hospitality for a while."

"Yeah," Mush said. "But how long? We're gonna run out of dough, or food, or somethin'. We'd just be stallin' for time."

The Thinker smiled. "Stalling for time." He gazed intently at the complicated structure in the center of the cellar. "But here is the logical vehicle for a getaway."

"You mean jump in that dizzy outfit and beat it?" Sammy demanded. "You're kidding."

"I'm serious," the Thinker replied. "Some time in the near future we'll be safe in the past."

III

IT TOOK A lot of figuring. That was the Thinker's job, working with the Professor during the next few days.

"How do you set the controls up? Is this for steering?"

"You do not steer—you press the computers. Here, I'll show you again."

"And you can choose any time in the past, any time at all?" asked the Thinker.

"Theoretically. The main problem is accurate computation. Remember, we and our earth are not static. We do not occupy the same position in space that we did an instant ago, let alone a longer period. We must consider the speed of light, planetary motion, inclination, and—"

"That's going to be your department. But you can establish past position mathematically and set up a guiding-plan for the computers accordingly?"

"I'm reasonably certain of it."

"Then all that remains is to determine where—or rather, *when* we're going to."

Sammy and Nunzio and Mush tackled *that* problem on their own.

"Jeez, mebbe alls we gotta do is go back a couple weeks to before when the Professor made his bets. Then we ain't out no dough."

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"Yeah? What about them there back taxes?"

"So we go to before when we owed 'em."

"That's when we went into business, stupid. We was broke."

"Well, if we can go anywheres we want in time, how's about way back, to the Egypians, like? I seen one of them there pitchers, they had all these hot broads runnin' around in their unnerwear—'

"You talk Egypian, stupid? Besides, we don't wanna stay back someplace forever. Way I figger, we go to some time where we can lay our mitts on some loot, real fast-like. And then come back."

"Now you got it. That's the angle. Hey, how about that there Gold Rush?"

The Professor interrupted them. "I'm afraid the Gold Rush wouldn't be of much use to you gentlemen. After all, it occurred in the year eighteen hundred and forty-nine."

"But you can send us to eighteen forty-nine, can't you?"

"Conceivably, if my theory is correct. But you would not be in California. You would still be right here in Philadelphia, in the filed which stood here before this house was built."

"Then we gotta find our loot in Philly, huh? Somewheres in the past?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Jeez. And we can't show up in no vacant field with that machine, either."

Then the Thinker took over. "I am beginning to pinpoint our problem," he announced. "Professor, I am going to utilize your library for a day or so. Perhaps I can discover when gold was available in Philadelphia."

"There's always the Mint."

"Too well-guarded. We'd never be able to loot it, any more than it could have been looted by past efforts."

"Banks?" Sammy brightened. "With our heaters, we could knock over one of them big jugs easy—say, a hunnert years ago."

"And come out with what? Old-fashioned greenbacks? We wouldn't be able to use currency of that era today. Arouse suspicion. No, I'm looking for gold."

Finally, in a copy of Berkeley's *History of the Revolution,* the Thinker found it. He broke in upon the others as they sat guarding Professor Cobbett.

"Here's the answer!" he exulted. "Remember what happened in Philadelphia on July fourth, seventeen seventy-six?"

"That's a holiday, ain't it?" Nunzio brightened. "Must be the Phillies took on the Giants in a double-header."

"Seventeen seventy-six stupid!" Sammy scowled. "Yeah, I remember. They made Washington the President."

"Nah. It was the Decoration of Indepenence," Mush corrected.

"Right. The Declaration of Independence was presented to the

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Continental Congress assembled at what is now Independence Hall. And so forth. But here's another little-known fact. At the same place, on the same day, the Revolutionary treasury was turned over to a small group for temporary storage. It consisted of upwards of thirty thousand pounds sterling in smelted ingots. That's about a hundred and fifty thousand dollars in gold."

"Brother!" Sammy whistled. "What a way to celebrate the Fourth!" Then he frowned. "I'll bet they had plenny guards around."

"No, that's just the point. It was all a secret—few people know of it to this day. Troops brought it in a wagon, around noon. They thought they were hauling documents. It was carted upstairs, and no guards were posted lest suspicion be aroused. Its presence was known only to Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and one or two others—probably John Hancock and maybe Charles Thomson, the Secretary of the Congress. It was to be used to pay troops and buy supplies."

"It sure could help to pay off old Mickey Tarantino and the Feds. And leave us plenny to spare."

"That is exactly what I had in mind, gentlemen." The Thinker smiled. "Now all that remains is to work out the details. I shall concentrate on the historical aspect and the Professor here can work out the mathematical computations."

Professor Cobbett blanched. "Mathematical computations? But you're asking the impossible. Why, that was over a hundred and eighty light-years ago; we'll be faced with the problem of billion-fold magnitudes, and the slightest error or variation can have serious consequences."

"Ain't gonna be no errors," Sammy told him. "Or consequences will be really serious. *For you.*" He showed the Professor his heater. "Now get to work. We're going places."

"Going places." Mush looked at him. "All this here stuff was at Indepenence Hall. The machine's here in the cellar. We gonna come out on July fourth inna cow-pasture or sómethin'?"

"That's your job," Sammy decided. "Case this joint. See how it's set up for guards at night. Alarm-system, the works. Look it over like you would a bank job. I think we can take over. Nobody's gonna think a mob would break into a Hysterical Shrine or whatever. We get things set, we hire us a truck and cart the machine right down to the Hall and take off from there some night soon. Right?"

"Hey, that's a tough deal."

"Things are tough all over," Sammy said. "Now get going."

So Mush got going and the Professor got going and the Thinker got going too. And before the first

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week was up they were organized.

Mush made his report. The invasion of Independence Hall could be made without too much trouble. Of course it would cost money for the truck, and there might be repercussions, but they could try to pull it off.

And in view of their present hopeless situation—and in view of the possible gain—it was worth the gamble, Sammy decided.

The Professor presented them with the working manual, based on his computations.

"Are you sure this gets us *there?*" Sammy demanded. "And back, too?"

"Look it over," the Professor said. "See for yourself."

"It's all right," the Thinker told him. "I've checked it. See, we have no set time for return. Our plans call for us to get the gold and come back as soon after the noon hour as possible. So the Professor has worked out return-variations based on five-minute intervals throughout the early afternoon. It's as foolproof as we can hope to make it."

"All right, if you say so." Sammy shrugged. "But what I want to know is, what do we do when we get there?"

"I've been working on that angle," the Thinker said. "Checking all the source books and references I could muster. History texts. Biographical data on Franklin and Jefferson in particular. And I've got a plan. Apparently the first ones to arrive that morning were Jefferson and Thomson. Franklin and John Hancock came in early too.

"It's not quite clear whether any of them spent part of the night there. The important thing is that the four men conceivably held an early morning meeting, discussing the Declaration before Congress convened on the fourth. So if we arrive early enough we'll be dealing with just four men. The four men who knew about the gold, by the way."

"Got it," Sammy said. "We come in, flash our heaters, and take over."

"Not quite so simple," the Thinker answered. "Remember, Congress will be gathering that morning. We can't hope to hold our guns on these four key figures from that time until noon. Any more than we can hope to pass unnoticed in the crowd for such a period."

He paused as Sammy started to open his mouth, then hastily continued. "I know what you're thinking, and that won't work either. We can't show up *at* noon and just hijack the shipment. Not in front of fifty or more men, with troops just outside the door."

"Then what do you figger on us doing?"

The Thinker took a deep breath, and then he told them.

"Oh no!" cried Sammy.

"Me, making like John Hancock?" Mush gasped.

"I should run around in one of

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them wigs like a big-shot politician?" Nunzio scoffed.

The Thinker was calm. "Don't you see, it's the only way? The wigs are perfect disguises. Look, I've got pictures of all these men, and we can buy a makeup kit. I'm fortunately bald and approximate Franklin's build. Physically, we'll get by. And don't worry about playing the role of a politician."

"Yeah." Mush was thoughtful. "After all, what's a politician, anyhow? Just a crook that's learned how to kiss babies."

"But we won't be kissing no babies that morning," Sammy reminded him. "Me, I been reading up a little on that stuff, too. Them four guys did a lot of things on the fourth. Made speeches, tried to get the rest of the Congress to sign, all kinds of stuff. And they knew everybody, everybody knew them. We'd fluff it for sure, trying to do what they did."

"That's just the point." Thinker Tomaszewski was triumphant. "We *don't have to do what they did!* Because we're going back in time, we're changing what happened. I think I'm familiar enough with Franklin's personality. I can talk if necessary. Sammy, I'll coach you. The other two boys can be absent, if need be—and it may well be necessary to guard our machine and our captives in the rear room. We're not going to merely re-enact history. We're going to change it, to suit ourselves. Now do you get it?"

They got it, eventually, because the Thinker rammed it down their throats.

And so they got their coaching, got their truck, got their plan, and actually transported the machine bodily into the rear of the vehicle on the evening arranged for departure.

It wasn't until they stood for the last time in the now open expanse of the cellar that Professor Cobbett voiced a final, timid protest.

"I hesitate to bring this up," he said, "because you'll very likely suspect my motives. You'll think it's because you're preempting my property, and because you are unwittingly involving me as an accomplice to your crime. You'll think it's because I have patriotic objections to your plans for desecrating our history."

"Well, haven't you?" Sammy asked.

"Yes, I admit it."

Sammy glanced significantly at Nunzio, then back to the Professor as he continued.

"But what I have to say to you now I say in my capacity as a scientist. In that capacity I warn you, as I did on the first evening here. Time-travel is hazardous. The possibility of alteration of the past due to your invasion cannot be discounted. You may well find yourselves up against unforeseen factors, unexpected problems. That's why I never dared make the attempt myself; not even a journey of one minute, let alone almost two cen-

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turies. Should you fail, I must absolve myself of any responsibility. I shall await your return with the utmost trepidation."

"Don't bother," Sammy told him. "We got that all figgered, too. You plan on waiting for our return with a gang of coppers, don't you?"

The Professor turned pale. "Don't tell me you gentlemen expect me to come along?" he murmured. "I couldn't do that. I wouldn't. I'd—I'd be afraid. Frankly, the dangers of dislocation or alteration in the past frighten me worse than the prospect of death itself."

"I'm glad," Sammy said slowly. "On account of it's either—or. And you just made up our minds for us."

The Thinker was already out in the truck, but Mush and Nunzio stood beside Sammy in the cellar.

Nunzio took out his heater and Mush smiled. "Well," he said. "Looks like we're starting off our trip with a bang."

IV

AND A BANG-UP journey it was. There was a route to travel, and guards to knock out and bind, and a heavy machine to cart up into the rear chambers of Independence Hall. Then came the nerve-wracking business of setting it up, and the Thinker's frantic re-scanning of the Professor's charts and directions as he set the computers. By the time they were ready to take off—1:45 a.m. on the dot—the transition itself was almost an anti-climax.

Anti-climax it proved to be. They huddled in the machine, the vacuum-lock set and the vacuum-lined walls enclosing them, and a generator hummed and their fluorescent light above the dials dimmed and the Thinker pressed his finger down after endless adjustment of tab-buttons and then—

Nothing happened.

Or seemed to happen, until the moment—or century, or eternity—of darkness elapsed. None of them were conscious of a change at all. It was when they opened the compartment and stepped out that the change occurred, or they were aware of its prior occurrence.

"Thinker!" Nunzio said, blinking in the bright morning sunlight that streamed through the high windows. "We made it!"

Sammy and the Thinker and Mush didn't even look at him. They were staring at the four men on the other side of the room—four men who stared, in turn, at them.

Then things happened fast. Things happened with orders and heaters and ropes and gags. Things happened with wigs and shoes and clothing.

Four writhing figures squirmed on the floor, then calmed to quiescence as Mush used the butt of his heater.

"Fancy *this*!" he sighed. "Me

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knocking out old Ben Franklin hisself!"

"Never mind fancying it now," the Thinker told him. "We've got to get ready for more action."

And so they'd gone into their act.

Altering the text of the Declaration itself was an inspiration on the Thinker's part.

"Give 'em something to argue about all morning," he said. "Keep them talking, then we don't have to. And if they accept the business about temporary governing powers and a treasurer, there'll be no questions asked when the gold arrives and we take charge of it."

He glanced at Mush and Nunzio. "You two go in the back room right now. Watch the machine, keep the Founding Fathers company. And don't forget to watch the windows—maybe the gold will arrive early. Professor Cobbett was no fool. I respect his judgment. If he said things might be a bit different in the past because our coming changed it, maybe he's right."

"Nothing different so far," Sammy said.

"Well, one never knows."

Mush and Nunzio vanished and the Thinker turned to his companion. "Remember your laryngitis. They call it quinsy in these times, and that's how I'll refer to it. And when I do, you cough."

"Got it," Sammy said. "But hey, when's the gang showing up?" He pulled his watch out of his pocket and studied it. "Must be after eight by now." He frowned. "That's funny, it stopped. Still says seven-thirty."

"Let me take a look outside," the Thinker suggested. He strode to the window. "Crowd down there all right. But—wait a minute—" He tugged Sammy's arm. "Look at those soldiers!"

"I see 'em. You mean the ones in the tall hats, with the red uniforms?"

"Red uniforms mean British troops."

"British?"

The Thinker didn't answer. He rushed to the door of the hall, flung it open. Two grenadiers in scarlet coats confronted him. He stared at the white piping on the coats, stared at the silvery steel of their bayonets.

"Halt!" cried the taller of the two. "In the name of His Majesty."

"His Majesty?"

"Yes, His Majesty, you pesky rebel."

"What kind of a gag is this?" Sammy muttered.

"No gag," the Thinker whispered. "Professor Cobbett knew. We changed the past by coming here. The British occupy Philadelphia."

"Enough of your blabbing, sirrah," the soldier shouted. "Save your protests for General Burgoyne. When he enters the city today you and your fellow-traitors can explain at a drum-head court martial."

The Thinker paled. "Changed history," he whispered. "Burgoyne the victor. The Congress scattered.

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The four men we came upon in the back room weren't waiting for it to meet today. They've been trapped here without warning. They're prisoners. Which means we're prisoners, too!"

"Oh no we ain't!" Sammy drew out his heater and pulled the trigger. There was an almost inaudible click. He tried to fire again, but the Thinker slammed the door.

"What good is that?" he murmured. "The place is surrounded."

"Gun jammed," Sammy was grumbling. "Can't figure how—" Then he blinked. "Surrounded. And we're stuck, huh? Now what?"

"Obviously we get back in the machine and get out of here."

"But don't you have to wait until noon, anyway?"

"I'll worry about that. Let's get the boys. And hurry. Those soldiers may decide to come in after us at any time."

So they retreated to the rear room and they got the boys and explained. And in a surprisingly short time they were huddled in the time-machine once more; huddled in the incongruous flummery of their Colonial costumes; huddled and trembling and perspiring as the Thinker hastily checked his data and then reached for the computer levers.

Reached and pressed.

Or tried to press.

"What's happening?" Sammy shouted, the echo of his voice almost deafening them in the cramped confines of the metal chamber.

"Nothing," the Thinker groaned. "Nothing's happening. Thats just the trouble."

"It don't work?" Nunzio wailed.

"No. And Sammy's watch doesn't work, and your guns don't work, because all of the principles are wrong, altered the way everything is altered."

"Let me try!" Mush pawed at the levers, the buttons, the dials. Then they were all clawing and scrabbling at once, and still nothing happened.

The Thinker stopped them. "Might as well give up," he muttered. "Professor Cobbett was right. We've changed the past."

"But even in seventeen seventy-six, guns and watches and machinery worked, didn't they?" Sammy demanded.

"In *our* seventeen seventy-six," the Thinker said. "In *our* past. But this isn't our past any more. It's our present. And by making the past the present we've violated a fundamental law. Or tried to. Actually, fundamental laws can't be violated."

"But we came here."

"Yes. Here. But here *isn't* our past. It couldn't be. It would have to be somewhere else."

"Where else could it be?" Mush wanted to know.

"A place where modern mechanisms don't work, not having been perfected yet. A place where the British defeated the forces of the Revolution and captured the

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Founding Fathers. And that could only be in—an alternate universe."

"Alternate universe?"

The Thinker was still trying to explain the concept of an alternate universe to them when the soldiers finally came in to drag them away.

He had time only for a final warning as the troops seized them. They were very rough about it.

"Remember, like Franklin said, we must all hang together," he whispered.

Even there the Thinker was wrong.

They were hanged separately.

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the winner and new...

by . . . Ib Melchior

A TV Emcee may assume anything he wishes about the big question contest lads. But it's unusual when they know all about Mars!

"HELLO—hello—hello! This is Bob May wishing a wonderful Quizz Night to one and all!"

The effervescent young man came bounding out on the brilliantly lighted stage of the gigantic Capitol Coliseum. The perpetual smile never left his handsome face, but a note of studied sincerity crept into his voice as he continued:

"From all of us here I want to welcome all of you out there in the Coliseum auditorium, and all you folks gathered around the over one hundred million TV sets watching us tonight. Yes, folks, tonight's the night! The one day in the week I know you impatiently wait for. But before we settle down to the important business at hand, here is a little message which I know will be of interest to you."

The lights pouring down upon the young Quizz Master dimmed, and simultaneously another part of the big stage became brightly illuminated. The small tally lights on the TV camera aimed at the

We have long been convinced that there is something about science fantasy which attracts, in electro-magnetic fashion, the brilliant sons of famous authors, artists, actors, physicians and tenors. Fritz Leiber, Jr., Manly Wade Wellman, and Samuel Merwin, Jr. are three writers of distinction in the genre we could mention in this connection. And now comes Ib Melchior with his second story for us, to strengthen our conviction quite unshakably. It is both gratifying to find a pet theory confirmed and to publish a story as unusual as this by a TV director who can tune in on the future at will!

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area sprang to life with a red glow. A breathtakingly beautiful girl stood smiling in front of the camera. After a musical fanfare she addressed the vast, unseen TV audience, her honied words rolling off her tongue in dulcet, sexy tones.

"Hi! Here I am again, your own Barrie Rose, to tell you about a *simply super* new product created for you by those *wonderful* people at REJUVENATION! Remember, only REJUVENATION products are *The Real Thing*—accept no substitutes! And now REJUVENATION has come up with something brand new. It is . . ."

The orchestra launched into an impressive fanfare.

". . . REJUVENATION'S new, unequaled *Plasti-Form Spray!* It comes in eight gorgeous, life-like colors and textures. Tough-hard *Plasti-Form Spray* for men, and soft, silken textures for women. Are you dissatisfied with your build? Is your figure sub-standard? If you want masculine muscles or enticing curves get REJUVENATION'S all-new *Plasti-Form Spray!* So easy to apply a child of five can do it! Take Barrie Rose's word for it, REJUVENATION'S *Plasti-Form Spray.* It's marvelorious!! And now, back to Bob May, and the contest you've all been waiting for."

Again the lights bathed the Quizz Master with their brilliance. This time the young man was joined by two others—one a rather stout, partly bald gentleman with old-fashioned rim-glasses, the other a younger, more robust looking fellow with a shock of iron-gray hair.

"Well, well, here we are again! And here, Ladies and Gentlemen, are our contestants. I hardly need introduce our Incumbent to you—forty-nine weeks undefeated. Here he is—*Charles Monroe!*"

The little stout man stepped forward and took a bow. The applause was thunderous in the vast hall. Then Monroe nervously fingered his rim-glasses and returned to his place.

"And here, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have this week's Challenger, Mr. *James Burton!*"

The applause was almost as deafening. Burton stepped forward and waved confidently to the multitude.

Bob May quickly interposed: "Folks! You all know how The Quizz is held—and how important it is. You remember that Mr. Monroe's category is *Philately*—and he certainly has shown us that there's little he doesn't know about postage stamps!"

He turned purposefully to Burton. His voice was tense with excitement as it rang out in the hushed auditorium: "And now, Mr. Burton, will you tell us—*what is your category?*"

A gaudy, multi-colored panel of many category listings suddenly blazed on across the back of the stage. Burton slowly turned and regarded the panel. The huge au-

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ditorium was whisper-silent. Then Burton said: *"The Planet Mars!"*

Bob May fairly jumped off the stage in his tempestuous excitement. "Ladies and Gentlemen! Our Challenger picks as his quizz category—*The Planet Mars!"*

The audience roared its delight.

"All right! You both know what to expect. The questions in your respective categories are selected by our own Univac Cybernetic Brain. No human being knows what they will be until *I* ask you the questions! Are you ready?"

Monroe swallowed nervously and adjusted his funny spectacles. He nodded.

Burton answered: "Yes, sir, Mr. May!"

"Good! As you know each one of you will be asked questions of increasing difficulty—until one of you misses! The survivor is the winner! But just so that you will have no outside disturbances—or help—" he waved a waggish finger at them—"you'll be enclosed in the special Force-Field. Nothing can penetrate, no light, no sound, no telepathic prompting! We can all see you, but you can't see us. That should be a comfort!"

He laughed uproariously at his own joke. "Only *I* can talk to you through my special communicator. But we can all hear your answers. And now—are you ready?"

Both contestants nodded.

"Here we go, then! But first . . ."

The commercial message by Barrie Rose over the cameras once again focused on Bob May and the two contestants. Around both the Incumbent and the Challenger hovered a curious shimmering, completely transparent shell. As the cameras went on, two metal rods ending in small cylindrical two-way transmitter heads rose out of the floor in front of each of the two contestants.

May adjusted his throat transmitter. "Can you hear me, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Yes," croaked Monroe. He had a frog in his throat.

"Perfectly," said Burton.

"Stand by for your first question then, Mr. Burton," said May. He turned to Barrie Rose who was standing off to one side.

"The first question from Univac," he said tensely.

Barrie Rose touched a button. Immediately a multitude of flashing lights on a huge panel traced an intricate pattern across the banks upon banks of small bulbs on the board. In less than a second there was an audible click, and Barrie Rose extracted a printed card from the machine. On it was Burton's first question. Bob May winced when he read it.

"Mr. Burton," he said, his voice ominously serious, "here it is: One of the most amazing cases of the purest coincidence known to the history of astronomy occurred when a medieval author in a book of fiction predicted that Mars has

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two moons! For your first question—what was the name of the book? Who wrote it? And when was it published?"

Burton's brow knitted. The audience held its breath. It was not an easy question. Would the Challenger flunk out at his first try? Then Burton straightened up: "The book was 'Gulliver's Travels,' published in seventeen twenty-six and written by one Jonathan Quick—no. *Swift*—Jonathan Swift!"

"Correct!" shouted Bob May.

The audience applauded wildly.

"Mr. Monroe's first question, Barrie Rose!"

"Here it is!" Bob May read earnestly: "One of the former Presidents of the United States was a famous stamp collector. During a war fought under his administration he advocated the occupation of a small island by United States troops because of his knowledge of that island through his hobby. For *your* first question—who was the President? What was the name of the island? In which postal district was it situated?"

Almost before May had finished reading the question Monroe answered: "Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The island was Mangareva in the postal district of Tahiti!"

"Right, Mr. Monroe! Right!" bellowed the Quizz Master, and the audience clapped and whistled and stamped its feet.

The questioning continued. The contestants ran neck to neck. But the strain began to tell. Monroe's glasses—forgotten—slid down his nose; Burton's shock of hair became disarranged. They had been at it for more than two hours, interrupted only by the REJUVENATION commercials after each set of questions.

The tension in the audience and throughout the nation was mounting. And still Bob May kept on asking questions: "Your seventeenth question, Burton. What is the highest point on Mars? How high is it? Who discovered it, and when?"

"Mount Kepler! It's a little over eighteen thousand feet above Canal Level. Discovered by Captain Peter Eriksen on the Third Martian Expedition in the year two thousand and seventeen."

"Correct!"

"Monroe—question seventeen for you. On what Twentieth Century stamps do you find the overprint, Z.A.? What do these letters stand for?"

"On stamps from old Armenia. Z.A. stands for *Zapadnya Armia,* meaning Western Army!"

"Correct!"

"Burton, number eighteen—it's a toughie! Of the over nine thousand different Martian plants, eight thousand and five are lichens and mosses. Of the remaining varieties which one is the rarest, and how does this plant multiply?"

Burton ran his hands through his already disheveled hair. His voice had long ago lost its cocki-

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ness. He hesitated in concentration for a moment, and then said: "I believe it's the Lizard Cactus. Its needles, bearing the spores, get stuck between the scales of the Lesser Canali Lizard and poison it. Then it uses the moisture of the animal to start the growth of the new plant."

"Right! Right all the way!"

"And you, Mr. Monroe, your eighteenth—another tough one! Of the so-called Presidential Series of postage stamps in use in the United States in the third quarter of the Twentieth Century what was the color of the three-cent stamp? And whose portrait was on it?"

Monroe licked his lips. Absent-mindedly he pushed his glasses up. The great hall was breathlessly quiet. Monroe was getting visibly tired!

"The three-cent stamp was—eh—deep violet, and—the portrait was of—of—George Washington!"

Bob May sucked in his breath. "No!" he exploded, "No! It was Thomas Jefferson! *You are wrong!!!*"

The audience gasped.

Wrong!

Monroe stood ashen-faced inside the Force-Field. Little beads of sweat were forming on his forehead and a tiny artery in his temple beat—and beat—and beat...

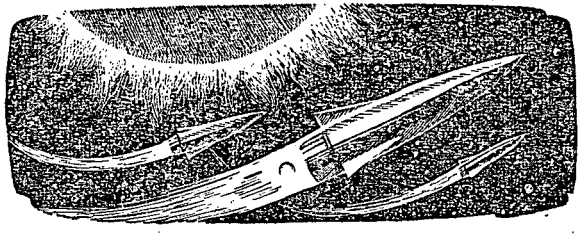
He did not utter a sound.

"I'm sorry," said Bob May in sepulchral tones. "Genuinely, deeply sorry!"

The communicator in front of Monroe quickly sank down through the floor. The shimmering shell around the man seemed for a moment to intensify. Then with lightning speed it collapsed upon itself and disappeared in a blinding implosion—and with it Charles Monroe!

Bob May whirled on the spell-bound audience. In ecstatic frenzy he shrieked: "I give you *James Burton*—the Winner and New President of the United States!"

The great audience went crazy!



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peace in the wilderness

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Like the great wooden horse of Homeric legend were the Pharigs —an enemy at the gates of a new Ilium's space-defended towers.

THE COUNTERMAN was getting nervous.

Kerry Donalson was the last customer in the little cafe. The clatter of dishes had completely subsided and to either side of him the cracked white-tile counter and worn stools were bare and clean and empty. Although Kerry was a well-dressed man far into his forties, the counterman hovered disrespectfully around him, giving a perfunctory toweling to surfaces already spotless. Finally, his starchy apron a-crackle with audible irritation, he demanded, "You got far to go, Mister? It's getting close to curfew!"

As if to emphasize the man's words, a blinding dazzle of white light flared in the street outside, arching through the glass front of the cafe.

"Not far," Kerry said and paid no attention to the lights. For thirteen years no street on Earth had been dark at night. And during all of those years without darkness Earth had been in a state of total war.

To explore the future with a myth-maker's divining rod may be a highly dangerous undertaking. You may venture far from familiar landmarks and find yourself turning a sickly shade of green. But so sturdily built and tremendous is the "Trojan Horse" which Marion Z. Bradley has envisioned here that the iron clang of his hoofbeats may even now be deceiving the world of tomorrow. The strangest of strange events becomes terrifyingly real and suspense mounts high indeed in this unusual novelette by the author of JACKIE SEES A STAR.

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A young man had come into the cafe with the lights, and was making his way toward the far end of the counter. As the counterman turned toward the new customer, Kerry pointedly buried himself in the front page of the *Times-Telegram.* Behind his paper he turned his wrist to look at the dial of his watch. *Half an hour before curfew,* the message had said. *I'll come up and speak to you. But don't speak to me.*

Kerry knew the headlines by heart, for he had scribbled his personal blue-pencil okay on every story. For five years now he had been editor, and part owner, of the *Times-Telegram.* Yet he continued to study the columns, as if something might be hidden there that would give him a clue to the mystery which had led him to seek a possibly dangerous meeting with a total stranger.

The main story read: EX-GOVERNMENT SCIENTIST AFFIRMS MOON BASE POSSIBLE. Earlier in the day Kerry had skimmed it professionally for typographical errors, and now he shrugged off the story itself with cynical amusement. It was nothing but a rehash of the usual hopeful platitudes. The moon base project had been definitely abandoned.

United Earth had been trying for twelve years to set a rocket on Luna, and before that, the Free Americas and the Asian Alliance had ruthlessly trampled one another in a futile race for a satellite station. But no drive, no known fuel could successfully propel a rocket beyond the outer limits of Earth's gravity.

That afternoon, Kerry had received a phone call from a dead man. Ben Thrusher had been a rocket research-expert for the Government of the Free Americas, but a tragic accident had made him one of the earliest casualties in Earth's war against the Pharigs. Or had it been an accident?

Farther up the counter, he heard the waiter grumble, "Counter's closed, lad. Too near curfew. You want to get picked up by the Night Police?"

"I only came to meet a friend here," the newcomer said.

Kerry, lifting his eyes from a routine headline, *Pharig Atrocities Spark Curfew Crackdown in Dallas,* looked up quickly and found himself staring at the face of a tanned youngster, maybe nineteen, maybe even younger. He was wearing blue jeans and a leather jacket.

"You must be Mr. Donalson?" the youngster said.

Kerry stood up. "And you're Lewis Fallon?" he asked.

The youngster nodded and touched Kerry's extended hand briefly.

"I thought you wouldn't show up," Kerry said. "Coffee?"

"No time," Fallon said. "Like the man said, it's near curfew, and we don't want to get picked up by the Night Police, do we, now?" The youth spoke with a faint in-

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flection of sarcasm, looking past Kerry at the recruiting poster which hung over the cash register.

AN EARTH DIVIDED
IS AN EARTH CONQUERED
Join the Night Police
Serve in Your Own Community!

Kerry shrugged into his overcoat, and flung a greenie on the counter. The counterman, making change, sounded apologetic. "I didn't mean to hurry you up, Mister. Only I live way out in the suburbs and I don't want to go home under police escort again. My wife gets nervous."

"That's all right," Kerry said. "Sorry I kept you from closing on time."

He left the change and went out into the glare of the streetlights, the Fallon youngster walking easily and warily at his side. He noticed that Fallon glanced nervously to right and left as they came out, as if he expected to see someone waiting. But the street was empty—a bare illuminated cavern that stretched away for endless miles, white with the billions of vapor-lamps that brightened every street and alley.

Earth was largely a continuous network of cities by now—and every inch of the crammed countryside, every solitary lane or alley.

"I hope, if you have a wife," Fallon said, "that she's not the nervous type."

"I called Ruth before I left the *Times-Telegram* building," Kerry said.

Fallon jerked his head in sudden anger. "I should think you'd have had sense enough to call her from a public telephone, Mr. Donalson! Damn it, why do you think I went to the trouble to meet you way out here?"

That did it. Kerry stopped walking and faced the youth. "Look here," he said, "I'm not going another step with you until you tell me what this is all about. Precisely where are we going, and why are you acting like a criminal conspirator?"

Lew Fallon frowned. "I should have warned you. Your office phone—can you swear it's not tapped?"

"Of course it's tapped," Kerry said, startled. He did not need to be reminded that newspapers—and other organs of information—were heavily censored for purposes of public wartime morale.

Fallon jammed his hands down in his pockets and sighed. "Well, I've brought you this far, so we may as well go on. But I don't like it. If that's the kind of person you are—" he checked his rising anger with a visible effort, and named a hotel halfway across town.

"But we can't get *there* before curfew, can we?" Kerry said. "Hadn't we better give our route and destination to the Night Police?"

Fallon turned abruptly, his young face tense in the bluish light. "Get this, Mr. Donalson. I'm tak-

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ing you to Ben Thrusher. If the Night Police get wind of this you'll lose the biggest news story of the year—to say nothing of what would happen to Ben. It was Ben who wanted it this way. Now, are you coming or aren't you, and to hell with the curfew! I can remember when it wasn't a crime to be on the streets whenever you had business to transact."

Lawbreaking comes hard to a respectable man. "If you'd printed as many stories of Pharig atrocities as I have," Kerry told him, "you'd know the curfew laws were for your own protection."

Fallon muttered something under his breath, and went on. Kerry followed, but he was not at all reassured. For many years only the Night Police, equipped with neuron-guns, had dared to walk the streets after curfew.

The Pharigs were immobile in daylight, but at night, despite the inhibiting curfew lights, they marauded the world. If they escaped the unknown menace of Pharig attack, there was still the dangerous risk of a crippling neuron-blast.

Neuron-guns were fatal to the non-human Pharigs, and the Night Police had orders to shoot first and ask questions afterward. The assumption was that if you were human, a neuron-blast wouldn't do you any lasting damage.

It was assumed that anyone on the streets after curfew without police escort—except in the protected areas reserved for necessary night workers—was either a criminal or a Pharig. No honest or sane Earthman had any business on the streets at that hour.

Kerry quickened his steps to match the hasty walk of the younger man. And all at once a random, surprising memory darted through his brain and he said aloud, "Lew Fallon!"

The youngster turned impatiently, and Kerry repeated, less sure of himself, "Lew Fallon. But no, it can't be! You're much too young to be the Lew Fallon who was killed by Pharigs eight years ago!"

"The rocket man? That was my father." Lew Fallon's mouth was tight. "He wasn't dead either—until a week ago."

"I don't understand," Kerry said. "Ben Thrusher and I were roommates in college, and we worked at a civilian center during the Three Days war. He was about the best friend I had until the Pharig invasion came, and the Army took Ben for rocket research. He and your father were killed when the Pharigs sabotaged an experimental rocket."

"Rubbish!" Fallon blurted out, then added quickly, "Look I can't explain. Ben Thrusher will have to do it."

Kerry had thought, at first, that the whole thing was a cruel or sinister hoax. But now the youngster's attitude convinced him otherwise. He hurried along, trying to match Fallon's stride. It was four

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minutes to curfew, and the streets were totally empty. But every shadow where the arch of light fell away became the possible lurking configuration of a concealed Pharig, or a uniformed Night Policeman. And there were many shadows.

He slackened his pace, a hand to the stitch in his side, angry at himself for the upsurge of excitement aroused by his own guilt. He hadn't broken any laws yet!

"This is the hotel," Fallon said abruptly. He stopped, and added with a shrug, "With just one minute to spare before curfew. Don't inquire at the desk. Go right up to Room four-o-seven."

He swung about on his heels, and walked swiftly toward the rear of the building.

Kerry started to follow, feeling a sudden desperate need to insist on a further explanation. But the sudden wail of the curfew siren drowned thought for a few seconds. When the noise died away he was standing inside the lobby, and a bellboy was bolting the doors behind him.

II

KERRY WENT on up. When he rapped at the door of Room 407, he was still breathless from climbing and it occurred to him, perhaps tardily, that he might be walking into a trap. But he put up his hand notwithstanding and knocked once loudly, determined to end the mystery as quickly as possible.

"Who is it?" called a muffled voice from within the room.

"It's Kerry Donalson—"

"Come in."

Kerry pushed the door open, and then stepped back in consternation. The room was in total darkness.

The unseen voice arrested his retreat. "Wait! Don't go. It's me, Kerry—"

"Ben!" Kerry moved quickly toward the sound, forgetting all caution. No one could have imitated that peculiar nasal inflection, even though the timbre of the voice itself had changed almost beyond recognition.

"Don't put on the lights just yet," Ben Thrusher warned from the darkness. "I don't want to frighten you off before you know it's really me. Remember Lavender Hall—the Marshall twins, Nancy and Norma, and that old porch swing? How's Ruthie? How's my godson, little Phil? The baby—Judith, wasn't it? —must be almost ten years old now."

Kerry found that his own voice was husky. "Okay, you've convinced me. Now can I put some lights on?"

Ben coughed and his voice grew steadier. "Go ahead. Only—I've changed a lot, Kerry."

Kerry found the light switch by the door, and managed to flick it upward. A wide swath of light flooded the room. Kerry's breath caught in his throat and he hardly recognized his own voice whispering hoarsely in the darkness.

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"For God's sake, Ben! I—I didn't know—"

The thing on the bed stretched its mouth in a grimace that ought to have been a smile, but wasn't. The skull was hairless, the face swollen; the lips a festering, toothless sore. The hands were wrapped in bandages that bulged out, awkward and useless, below the split sleeves of flannel pajamas.

Ben Thrusher moved his head slowly from side to side.

"Radiation burns," he said, steadily. "It doesn't hurt much at this stage, Kerry. But now you know why I wanted you to recognize me first in the dark."

"My God," Kerry murmured, and it was a prayer. "We—we thought you were dead eight years ago. Did the Pharigs—"

"Pharigs!" Kerry was horrified to see Ben's toothless mouth twist into a wide, tormented smile. "I might have known you'd say that—"

"But how—how did it happen? Ben, have you seen a doctor?"

"No. When I came here I was still recognizably myself in a dim light. A doctor would have reported to the Army, to make sure I'd die in a cell and never get a chance to say what I've got to say."

Kerry started, feeling suddenly convinced that Ben's mind had been unhinged by suffering. But his eyes—mere slits in angry flesh—met Kerry's with a steady calm.

"I'm not insane, Kerry. If you don't believe me, call an ambulance. Or to save trouble—call the Night Police. The outcome would be the same. You'd never see or hear of me again. They'd hold me incommunicado and my death would not be long delayed. If you're in mortal terror of the dictatorship, I can die all right without your help! Only I thought you had courage enough from the old days. The courage to be an honest newspaperman and tell the public the truth."

"Sure," Kerry soothed. "But first we've got to get you to a hospital, old fellow. I won't let them lock you up."

Again the slow, tormented smile. "Stop humoring me, Kerry." One of the bandaged hands moved, clumsily tugging at Kerry's arm in an absurd but heartbreaking gesture of reassurance. "The doctors couldn't do much. I've had it, Kerry. They'd just make sure I didn't talk—"

Carefully Kerry lowered himself toward the bed. Ben winced, warding him away with a clumsy forward movement of his shoulders. In tight-lipped concern Kerry drew up a chair, and leaned forward.

"Why should they do a thing like that?" he asked.

"I'm *trying* to tell you!" The raw flesh around Ben's mouth contracted in a spasm that could have been agony—or anger. "I'll give you a story that will shake the world!"

"If he can print it," said a tight voice behind them. Lew Fallon

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came in, shutting the door carefully behind him.

Instantly Ben twisted on the bed, in a convulsive movement of pain and fear. "What does he mean? Kerry, tell me. I must know. Can you print it? Do we still have a free press?"

"What the devil—" Kerry remembered that Ben was a very sick man, and compassionately amended his tone. "Of course we have a free press. Why not? Where have you been, to ask that?"

Ben Thrusher said, his voice muffled, "I've been on the moon."

In three incredulous strides Kerry was across the room, uncradling the telephone.

Lew Fallon took a catlike step toward him. "What are you going to do?" he demanded.

Kerry let the dial spin back. "I'm going to call a doctor," he said. "Ben needs help."

Lew Fallon wrenched the receiver from his hand. "Oh, no you're not," he said, his voice defiant.

As Kerry broke away the bandaged man on the bed stirred.

"Let him alone, Lew," Ben pleaded. Then, more quietly: "Kerry, you idiot, come over here and listen to me. I'm not going to be able to talk much longer. My throat's giving me hell. I haven't the time nor the strength to spend hours softening you up and trying to convince you. You've got to trust me, Kerry! I haven't got many words left and I'll be damned if I'll waste them—" His voice thinned and he lay back, his face ashen. There were dark stains on the rumpled pillow.

Kerry returned to the bed, and sat down. He said, "Do you mean the Pharigs have a prison base on —our moon?"

"No, not the Pharigs!" Ben spoke with a flare of furious energy, then sank back helplessly, pressing one of his useless hands against his throat.

Lew Fallon brought him a glass of water from a pitcher on the bureau, and Kerry supported him while he drank it, in great greedy swallows. Kerry could feel the fever heat in the man's skin.

He pleaded, "Ben, if you're afraid to go to a hospital, let me take you home to Ruthie. I know a doctor who can be trusted—"

"Ruthie!" Ben's eyes brightened in momentary warm gratefulness. Then he shook his head. "Thanks, Kerry. But I've no intention of making it difficult for her. I've only a day or two left. It's just that—I didn't want to crawl in a hole and die like a rat without a word to anybody."

His eyes closed and Kerry thought for a moment that he had fainted. He arose, and began to tiptoe across the room. Maybe he could persuade Lew Fallon to some logical course of action.

But at the first step, Ben's eyes opened. "Come back here, Kerry, and sit down!" he said, raising himself with an effort. "I'm not

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dead yet! The Army men picked up Chapman, and—*I'm* supposed to have died in the crash." His voice held a brief trace of its old vigor, and he put a completely steady hand to his ruined face.

"There was faulty radiation shielding in our ship. It was privately built, but you'd be surprised if I told you who financed it. We didn't have proper facilities to test it. Quite as important, we weren't fit to stand acceleration. That takes young men—tough, experienced test pilots. Fallon died when we took off. I made it—there and back. But Chapman and I won't live to be heroes. How about it, Kerry? Is the story worth it?"

"Good God," Kerry said simply. For a moment, his eagerness to get all of the facts outweighed even his concern over Ben's desperate condition. A dozen urgent questions trembled on his tongue, but he resolutely suppressed his curiosity.

"I still say you'd be better off at my house," he said.

Lew Fallon crossed the room to stand beside him. "I'm afraid he's right," he said. "There's an alert out on the Night Police frequency. I was listening just now. I knew it was a mistake to call you at the newspaper building."

Ben said in a barely audible whisper, "I don't want to get you in trouble if I can help it, Kerry. Or you either, Lew—"

Fallon made a reckless gesture of repudiation. "Trouble's what I'm looking for! This was a free country once! They owe me something for all the years I thought my Dad was dead—"

Ben Thrusher sank back against the pillows, his body racked by coughs. When the spasm quieted he muttered, "Remember, Kerry doesn't know, and we've no time now to explain. Can you get us out of here?"

"I guess so—if Mister Donalson isn't afraid to take a few risks," Fallon said bitterly.

Kerry turned on him angrily. "Knock it off, will you? I'm here. Isn't that enough?"

Like many men who lead fairly dull lives and only daydream about adventure, Kerry resented its intrusion into everyday life, and felt almost personally indignant about what seemed like heroics on young Fallon's part. Still, in some obscure corner of his brain, he *knew* that Ben was neither raving nor a madman.

Fallon had slipped out of the room, and Ben now lay with his eyes closed. But Kerry, seeing the swollen lids flicker, guessed that the dying man was only avoiding questions. It was vitally necessary for him to hoard his small strength, but a furious impatience nagged at Kerry, and he paced the room restlessly until young Fallon reappeared.

Over his arm the youth carried a huge, loose raincoat. He said to Kerry, "The place is all locked up for curfew. But there's a service

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door. If we get caught, leave everything to me." He went to the bed and drew back the blankets.

"Do you think you can walk, Ben?" he asked, his voice tight with concern.

Kerry gasped with horror. Ben's feet were swollen to nearly three times their normal size. Fallon produced an enormous pair of carpet-slippers, slit them at toe and heel, and knelt to put them on the useless feet.

Ben forced himself painfully to a sitting position, and just as he did so Lew broke into Kerry's frozen dismay with a rasping, "Come and help me, Mr. Donalson. Can't you see we'll have to carry him?"

They bundled the raincoat over Ben's pajamas, lifting and supporting him. Ben crossed the room in a shambling walk, dragging himself along between Lew and Kerry as if the men were living crutches. Although he did not say a word, Kerry felt him wince and heard the harsh catch of breath each time he set one of the swollen feet to the ground. They could only guess at his pain.

Somehow they got him into a small service elevator and rested, breathing harshly—Ben was a large and heavy man—while it made a creaky and slow descent.

The back door opened on a narrow areaway, lying deserted in a brilliant vapor-light which brightened its every ugly crevice from the building to the curb. They hoisted Ben bodily into the front seat of a small, war-model electric automobile, and Kerry climbed in after him.

The big man sagged on Kerry's shoulder. Kerry looked curiously at Fallon as the youngster climbed into the driver's seat.

As if sensing his apprehensive scrutiny Fallon explained, "We'll take a chance on the law of averages. How many Night Police are in the city? They can't check every street, and they usually concentrate on deserted spots."

III

LEW FALLON drove the car down the main street. They encountered no other car, and saw only one pedestrian—a solitary Night Cop lounging in a doorway, his neurongun a luminescent halo on his hip. The police officer did not even raise his head as their car's lights swung across his uniform.

Lew laughed, harshly and contemptuously. "See? They think the whole city is so scared by now that no one would dare to be here without a police permit!"

They were rapidly approaching Kerry's street, and the newspaperman was beginning to relax. He had almost convinced himself that the peaceful drive was an anti-climax to a melodramatic prelude when a blinding shaft of light crossed their headlights. One of the small, fast prowlies darted from a side-street and completely

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blocked their passage, blinking a menacing red signal.

Lew jammed on the brakes.

A uniformed man jumped from the prowlie, his right hand ghostly by the phosphorescence around his neuron-gun. He strode up to the car.

"What is it this time?" he asked angrily. "Are you taking your wife to the maternity hospital? If you're not, your excuse had better be good."

Kerry was startled. As was so often the case with law-abiding citizens, it had never occurred to him that the Night Police had to deal with such minor violations fairly often. In the news stories he printed such violations were a serious matter and the Night Police fast on the trigger. This particular officer had his neuron-gun in readiness, but otherwise he sounded like an argumentative daytime traffic cop.

Lew completely lowered the front window. "I'm glad we ran into you," he said. "My friends and I were playing cards at my house and we forgot the time. It was after curfew when we broke the game up, and when I tried to call up for a police escort, my phone was out of order and this guy's wife is waiting for him. We called and called, but we couldn't even get the operator. So we decided to go out and hunt one up."

The nightman glanced in the window, his disinterested eyes passing over Ben, sagging beneath the raincoat and slouch hat. He stared for an instant at Kerry in his neat snap-brim and overcoat. Then he holstered the neuron-gun.

"Go ahead," he said. "I'll follow you."

They pulled up before Kerry's house, and the policeman got out of the prowlie again and came to the car window. "I want to see you get in off the street. Go on in right now. And another time, keep an eye on the clock, will you?"

Lew grumbled, "Helluva note when it's a crime to drive your friends home—"

The policeman was bored, but courteous. "It's no crime to be on the street. But the law says you have to tell us beforehand for your own protection. That way we know who you are and where you'll be, and won't make the mistake of shooting you for a Pharig. You want me to radio for a permit for you to drive home?"

Fallon looked at Kerry. "No thanks, we'll spend the night here."

"Sure, glad to have you." Kerry said, picking up his cue. The policeman lost interest and turned away.

For his benefit, Lew said in a loud voice, "Our friend here's had one too many. We'd better give him a hand or he'll flop on his noggin."

Grudgingly admiring Fallon's quick thinking, Kerry helped him hoist the sagging Ben out of the car. As they stumbled up the steps Kerry saw, behind the curtained

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window of the front door, the silhouette of a woman. He called out, and the door opened from inside. Swiftly they hauled Ben over the threshold.

Ruth Donalson, her fingers still gripping the doorhandle, cried out in relief as Kerry came toward her.

"Kerry! Oh darling, do you know what time it is? I was so frightened—" Her eyes fell on the sagging man and all the blood ebbed from her face.

Lew Fallon moved, with a catlike swiftness, to slam the door before her scream could reach the ears of the departing policeman.

The woman wailed "*Ben!* What has *happened* to you?"

"Be quiet, Ruthie," Kerry urged.

Ruth subsided and drew back, her eyes wide with distress and pity.

Ben's lips moved in their frightful smile. "Anyway you recognized me, Ruthie," he said. "That's more than Kerry did."

Ruth Donalson was quick to recover her self-control. "But you are hurt. You're sick! The front bedroom, Kerry, it's closer. Let me go first and pull down the shades."

She hurried ahead, drawing down opaque blinds in a room of spacious dimensions. There was a moment of waiting. They heard the prowlie roar and drive away. Finally Ruth pulled down a blanket and let the two men ease Ben Thrusher down on the clean sheets.

"What's the matter with him, Kerry?" she demanded, while Lew Fallon bent to help Ben out of the bursting slippers.

Ben Thrusher closed his eyes and said huskily, "Radiation burns. Don't worry, Ruthie—I'm in no great pain. It's swell to see you again. You go on to bed now. I've got to talk to Kerry while there's still time."

"Do as he says, dear," Kerry said. "If there's any trouble I want you to be able to say honestly that you didn't know anything about it."

Ruth started to leave, then turned in bewildered uncertainty toward Lew Fallon. Kerry, recalling himself, said: "Mr. Fallon—my wife. You remember Dr. Fallon, Ruthie?"

Ruth nodded. "Yes, of course. And this young man is his son. I'm sorry we haven't another guest room. But I'll make up a bed right away—"

"Please don't bother," Fallon protested. "I don't think any of us will do much sleeping."

Kerry asked: "Are the kids in bed, dear?"

"Yes, hours ago—or they ought to be," Ruth said. The words were hardly out of her mouth when there was a sudden sound behind her.

"Phil!" Kerry snapped, catching sight of a small freckled face in the doorway, "Go right back to bed this instant."

"I heard the police car, Daddy—" the little boy started to protest. But Ruth hurriedly blocked the door so that he could not see

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into the room, and pulled it shut behind her.

Inside the room, Ben Thrusher said, "Ruthie hasn't changed a bit, has she? Bless her! Phil must be quite a boy by now," he added with a faint sigh.

"Did you really want to see the kid, Ben?"

Ben said quietly, "Sure. But I don't want him to see *me*. Not like this."

Kerry said uncomfortably, "Ben, is there anything I can do for you, anything you need? Should I try to get hold of that doctor I mentioned?"

But Ben's eyes had slipped shut. Kerry drew up a chair, and sat motionless at his old friend's side for some minutes. In the back of his mind he was still as concerned as ever about Ben. But the instincts of a newspaperman are a recognizable syndrome. Hunger, thirst and sex are minor tropisms compared to a newsman's curiosity.

He got up and joined Lew Fallon, who had drawn the shade a little aside and was looking out guardedly into the lighted street.

He said "They're not likely to look for him here. And now don't you think you owe me some explanation of all this? I heard that the Army closed down the rocket project—about the time Ben was supposed to have been killed."

Fallon let the shade fall into place, and turned around with a gesture of bitter impatience. "And didn't it ever strike you as being deliberately planned? When the whole planet is in the throes of total war with invaders from outer space why would the Army close down rocket research at the precise moment when four top scientists disappear!"

Kerry thought he was beginning to understand. "You mean the project just went underground? Then why—"

The bandaged man on the bed stirred. He said, "Let me tell it, Lew. No, it wasn't an Army ship. You might call me a—well, a fifth columnist. The Army really thought I was dead. I covered my tracks pretty well." Ben's voice had cleared a little, and was almost recognizable.

"Listen carefully, Kerry. When the Science draft took me in the Army I was told I'd be working on rockets and guided missiles for the Free Americas. We were all set to beat the Asian Alliance to the Moon. We even had rocket bombs with thermonuclear warheads to blast the Asians right off the planet if they gave us any trouble. Then we're confronted with the Pharig threat, and immediately the Free Americas are rubbing noses with the Asians. And what does Earth-United Science Service order me to do? Build solar-power packs—cheap power for private homes. *War effort,* they called it!"

"But the solar-power project *was* a wartime measure," Kerry pointed out. "The big central power-plants were too easy a target. Remember

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when the Pharigs bombed Niagara and Grand Coulee? If we'd ever had a complete power failure in those areas—"

"Considerate of them, wasn't it—to wait until everyone in both areas was using solar power," said Ben quietly. "I know all the arguments for decentralization, Kerry. I fell for it too—for a while. Do you remember the big Pharig ships that crashed in Iceland and Tibet?"

On familiar ground now, Kerry said, "Sure. I went to Iceland to get the story."

Embittered laughter came from Ben's ravaged throat. "I'll bet you didn't get within a mile of it!"

"You lose your bet. I saw it from two hundred feet. But I wasn't allowed aboard, and the Army officials deliberately exposed all the film we brought, so we couldn't print photographs."

"For the omnipresent reason of public morale, I suppose," Ben commented. "I wasn't allowed aboard, either. Not a single man from the rocket-research division was allowed aboard. But they couldn't clamp down on public information eight years ago the way they can today. Pass or no pass, I decided I'd get to see the thing from the inside. So, finally, I did get aboard. And I snooped and snooped until I found it—" His voice thinned out.

Kerry had to prompt him. "Found what?"

"I still don't know who slipped up and left it there for me to find," Ben said. "But when I saw it, I resigned. That Pharig ship was made right here on Earth, Kerry. It didn't come from outer space at all."

Kerry looked at him, appalled. "Does that mean—that some men from the rocket project sold out to the Pharigs?"

Lew Fallon cut in angrily, "Listen to what he *says*, will you, not to your own ideas! Why do you think he had to disappear? He's trying to tell you that the ship was a big fake. There aren't any Pharigs. There never were any!"

If Ben had said it, Kerry might have dismissed it as delirium. He stared at the hard-headed youth, then back at the dying man on the bed. Ben's hairless skull moved in silent agreement. When the silence threatened to become unendurable, Kerry said quite reasonably, "But that's impossible."

"Have you ever seen a Pharig? Has anyone you know ever seen one? What do you know about the Pharigs? Not just what do you copy off the news releases and the news wires and the propaganda releases of Earth United, but what do you *really* know?"

Kerry pressed his fingers against his eyes. "How do I know the south pole exists? I've never been there. How do I know the moon's not made of green cheese? No, I've never seen a Pharig."

"And neither has anybody else, because there aren't any such creatures."

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"You're crazy," Kerry said. But to his surprise his voice carried no conviction. He was trying to remember the different Pharig atrocity stories he had printed in the last year. People brutally murdered in the streets—buildings and property wrecked. Yet the crime rate was falling so low that city after city was abolishing its prison system. If the Pharigs did not exist, why were such inhuman acts committed?

He put the question in terrible puzzlement, adding, "Of course I've never seen a Pharig. Not to my knowledge. But they're humanoid. It takes a neuron-gun charge to prove a man isn't one, and if he is, there isn't enough left for an autopsy. For all I know, you could both be Pharigs!"

"Convenient, isn't it?" Ben Thrusher said, a bleak hopelessness in his voice.

Lew Fallon interrupted. "Have you ever seen a single so-called Pharig atrocity that couldn't be the work of human vandals or hooligans?"

Kerry said helplessly, "There's no arguing on those grounds."

Ben twisted spasmodically on the bed, pressing his swollen face into the pillow. His voice came out muffled. "No arguing with me. What about you? You understand it better now. Even if the hoax could be exposed, who'd believe it after thirteen years? And the longer it goes on, the harder it would be to convince anyone. Oh hell, why didn't I die in the crash? After all I went through to get in touch with you—" He pounded the pillow furiously with his swathed fists, then collapsed and lay still, gasping and choking.

Kerry approached the bed and laid a hand on the quivering shoulders. "Try to get some rest, old man. Can't you tell me in the morning?"

Ben Thrusher rolled over. His face had visibly deteriorated in the last few hours. Now it was a swollen, grotesque mask, unnaturally drained of all expression.

Fallon said fiercely, "Give him a chance, will you? He hasn't time to argue every point with you! And if you believe in this nonexistent war, name one war plant that's making anything in the shape of a weapon! Why did we never use any of our stockpiled H-bombs against the Pharigs?"

"In our own atmosphere?" Kerry demanded. "If we'd done that the radioactive fallout would have endangered the lives of our own citizens!"

"I *know* what the war plants are making. Solar power packs. I'll bet you have one on this house right now?" He mimicked Kerry's nod. "Cheap proteins, yeast and fungi stuff, for the Famine Belt countries—"

"Well, what of that? An Earth divided is an Earth—"

"I'd rather you didn't repeat that one-world propaganda excuse in my presence," Ben said weakly.

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"Why didn't we accept the risks and wallop the Pharigs right out of the Solar System?"

"When we didn't even have space flight?"

Ben gave an almost inarticulate groan of protest. "We didn't have space flight? The everlasting hell we didn't! I developed the drive myself—my team, that is—and the Army of Earth United thanked us politely, closed down the rocket project and told me to go build solar power packs instead."

His voice failed, and Fallon took up the story. It had taken them eight years. Young Fallon did not know all of the details, but he sketched them in. Eight years of being officially dead; eight years of hiding, of working in secret.

He would not name the private enterprise and industries who had financed the ship. But he was quite explicit about their reasons. They were men, and groups of men, who for one reason or another hated the new regime. They were men who had been appalled by what they considered the betrayal of the Free Americas through cooperation with the Asian Alliance and who rebelled against the military rule which the population as a whole accepted as a necessity. They were above all men who objected to the decentralized police law—for although the Army of Earth United functioned on a planet-wide scale, there was no other government more central than the local government of each city.

"But why," Kerry asked, "would anyone deliberately set out to hoax a whole world?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Ben Thrusher stirred against Ruthie's embroidered pillowcases. "Power. The seeds were planted far back in the Third World War, when they first began giving the President special emergency powers. The Three Days' War put the whole continent under martial law, and now their non-existent Pharig invasion has done the same for the whole world!"

Kerry was almost beyond speech. He got up and paced the room in silence. Finally he said: "It makes a kind of sense. Only maybe there was an emergency you don't know anything about. Would you rather have the Free Americas and the Asian Alliance dropping bombs on each other? Remember the Three Days' War—"

"But we *won* it!" Ben said fiercely. "We were a great nation then! We could knock out half the world at the push of a button, and now—"

Fallon chimed in, "And now we have a non-existent war where nobody gets killed except on paper, where the Asian Alliance no longer threatens our very existence—"

"—and where scientists spend their valuable time and resources fiddling with solar power and free food and birth control when we could have freed the world and set our course for the stars." Ben's voice shook with the intensity of

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his emotion. "Kerry, what have we got?"

Beyond the window, the curfew lights winked out.

"If you're right," Kerry said thoughtfully, "We've got what men have been looking for since history began. We've got peace."

Ben Thrusher shook his head. *"Solitudinem faciunt: pacem appelant,"* he quoted with heavy bitterness. "They make a wilderness and call it peace!"

IV

SUNLIGHT WAS streaming in through the window of Kerry's private office. He stared at the sheet of paper which he'd just removed from his typewriter, and said—more to himself than to Lew Fallon—"Someone once said that you can't fool all of the people all of the time."

"The hell you can't!" Fallon's voice was bitter. "It's been done time and time again! Hoaxes, even clumsy and silly ones, have thrown whole states into panic until somebody in an 'official' position denied them. This time, there were no denials, that's all. What do people believe? On a world as big as this one, by and large, they believe what they're told."

Fallon leaned across Kerry's desk. "Listen. I was a rookie in the Night Police. I never saw a Pharig, but it never occurred to me to doubt their existence. My training manuals told me how to fight them. I had a special gun to kill them. My whole job was to keep people off the streets to protect them against the Pharigs! If a crime was committed, and we failed to actually catch somebody in the act, everyone assumed that the Pharigs had done it. Humans weren't supposed to be *capable* of such things! I'm just learning what humans are capable of! A thousand—even five hundred—people could know and share the secret, and a whole world could be hoaxed!"

Kerry handed Fallon his editorial. "If we can get this into print we can start people asking questions," he said.

He was remembering all he had heard from Ben, and from young Fallon after he had finally persuaded Ben to take a sedative and try to sleep. Kerry himself had not slept at all. During his years as head of the *Times-Telegram* he had been content to print the news as he received it. He had been content to be just another dupe in the human herd!

Now Ben Thrusher was giving his life so that the truth could come out. The fact could not be disputed. If Ben had given himself up for immediate medical attention, they might have been able to save him. By the ghosts of all newsmen, here was a crusade worth taking on!

The youngster was musing over the editorial. " 'It has long been the policy of this paper to print all the news without bias and without

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questioning the sources, when we had reasonable assurance of the integrity of those sources,'" he read aloud. "I like this part down here better, though. 'The people of the sabotaged former Government of the Free Americas have been made the victim of the most audacious coup in modern history—'"

Someone knocked at the door. When Kerry drew back the bolt and looked out the morning sunlight glinted brightly on a metal service belt and the sombre color of a uniform.

"Mr. Donalson?" the policeman asked.

Kerry nodded, and stepped back from the doorway.

The man showed credentials. "I believe you once knew a government scientist by the name of Benedict Thrusher?" he said. "Is that correct?"

Kerry frowned. "Why, yes. We were very good friends at one time. When he died eight years ago—" Kerry paused in consternation.

Lew Fallon's muscles had gone rigid. He tried to telegraph to the youth, with a casual nod, that what he was witnessing was just the routine inquiry which he had been expecting all along. But it was no use. He knew he had to get Lew Fallon out of the room before he did something unwise.

Kerry said to the policeman, "Excuse me just a minute." Then he pointed to the editorial in Fallon's hand. "Joe, take that down to the press room and tell them to give it a box on the front page."

He prayed that Fallon would see through the little comedy and would obey him without question. He had a bad moment—fortunately the policeman's back was turned—when Fallon looked startled and indignant. But he need not have been alarmed. Fallon glanced down at the editorial and almost instantly departed.

"Check, Mr. Donalson," Fallon said.

Kerry tried not to let his relief betray him. He turned abruptly and gave his attention to the policeman again. "You were saying?"

The officer put his credentials away. "Please come with me, Mr. Donalson," he said.

Kerry's solar plexus knotted. "Do you mind telling me why?" he demanded.

"I'd rather not say here," the officer replied.

Kerry stood up and reached for his coat. It still might be the routine inquiry. More as a test than as a real question. "May I call my wife?" he asked.

The policeman motioned Kerry to precede him through the door. "There's no need for that," he said. "You'll be coming right back."

Kerry framed a silent *"Oh yeah?"* but he did not say it aloud. He sagged despondently in the seat of the prowlie, while the siren screamed through the jammed streets.

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After a few minutes, he decided that a too-stubborn silence could be as dangerously revealing as unguarded talk.

"Why am I being taken in a police car?" he asked, in a dignified way. "Where am I going?"

The officer answered at once. "Your friend didn't die, Mr. Donalson. He's up in the police-precinct hospital. I guess he asked for you."

"Ben Thrusher?" Kerry felt trapped. He had been so sure that Ben would be safe at his house. But if they had taken him from there, what might have happened to Ruthie and the children? He found himself wishing that Ben had chosen a man without wife or children to confide in.

The precinct station of the Night Police was an immense re-modelled factory. Inside, the halls were dusty, and full of odd unfamiliar smells. Only on the top floor was the corridor sanitary, and pungent with the flavor of disinfectants. Still shepherded by the policeman, Kerry found himself being hustled along behind the white-smocked back of a capped nurse.

The policeman said in a whisper, outside a door, "Your friend's in there. I better warn you, he's a mess. I guess the Pharigs had him prisoner all these years. He looks like it, anyway."

Kerry went in. The walls and the bed and pillows were a pale frosty green. Ben's face, against that cool background, was shocking, horribly disintegrated even in the few hours since Kerry had last seen him. A needle dripped fluid into an immobilized arm. The hands, tightly re-bandaged, showed brownish stains through the white folds.

Across the bed, Kerry faced a tall darkly handsome man, uniformed—not in the sombre color of the Night Police—but in the blazing blue of the Army of Earth United. A commander's stars sparkled on his sleeve.

Kerry said softly, "Ben—"

Ben's eyes forced themselves open. A pallid flicker of recognition stirred in them, and the hideous cavern of the mouth moved. From somewhere back of it a deep despairing sound came, that might, or might not, have been a word. Even that much effort twisted the ruined face into spasms, and the tall man on the other side bent forward.

"Don't try to talk," he said gently. "Everything's all right."

Questions were screaming inside Kerry's brain—questions Ben could never answer and the police probably would turn aside. He stared in fierce interrogation at the stranger, who bowed very slightly.

"Mr. Donalson?" the tall officer said, "I am Commander Shakhara Lal, stationed in Delhi." He offered his hand, but Kerry ignored it. The commander walked around the bed. "I assure you, Mr. Donalson," he said, "we knew Ben Thrusher's whereabout's long before he tried

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to contact you. We had not the slightest desire to make him prisoner, although if he had surrendered himself sooner—" he broke off, looking at Ben's inert body.

"Dr. Chapman is recovering nicely," he added. He spoke perfect English, but a certain extra precision and sibilance betrayed that it was not his native language.

Kerry started to speak, but just then the face on the pillow suddenly loosened and seemed to come apart. The nurse started forward, then tightened her lips and said reproachfully, "He's gone! If we'd had him here a week ago—"

While the nurse drew the sheet over what had been Ben Thrusher, Kerry stood motionless, unnerved by tension and grief and a sense of futile wrath. He looked up suddenly and realized that Commander Lal seemed equally unnerved.

The Indian was looking down at the shrouded form, and his fists were tightly clenched. He said aloud, and not to Kerry, "If he could have waited only three more years he would have seen the end of it. He could have had the glory he deserved."

He raised his head, and now he was speaking to Kerry. "There's nothing more that anyone can do now for him here. Mr. Donalson, will you join me in the office downstairs?"

He left the room without a backward glance, walking with an air of authority as if it never occurred to him that anyone could question his orders. Kerry's brain, cold with anger, began working again as soon as he stepped out into the corridor. He knew that downstairs were precinct headquarters, offices, the barracks of the city's enormous force of Night Police, and the detention cells where he supposed they'd hold him incommunicado—like Ben's colleague. But if he could get away—

They'd expect him to hide, naturally. What else does a fugitive do? But all he wanted was to make sure that his editorial got printed and the *Times-Telegram* reached the streets.

After that he couldn't disappear, or be listed as—he understood it better now—another Pharig casualty. He could do that much for Ben's memory, and he would do it, or die in the attempt.

At the end of the corridor, past the elevators, a small and narrow stairway led down to what was evidently a back alley. Kerry waited until the commander had stepped into the elevator, followed by the policeman who had brought Kerry here. Then he abruptly stepped back, dodged, and made a break for the stairs.

Someone behind him gave a startled shout. There was the sound of a door slamming shut, running feet, and then, just as Kerry reached the top step, someone yelled, "Stop that crazy fool!"

A blinding light stabbed at Kerry's eyes, and a paralyzing cold hit him over the heart. Then every

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nerve and muscle contracted in agony and he collapsed in a bundle of jerking reflexes. Conscious, but powerless to control his body, he felt himself rolling, twisting and bumping, down the stairs. His head struck marble, and he blacked out.

V

KERRY BECAME aware again of his surroundings very slowly. First there was light and air and the jab of a needle in his biceps. Then his eyes blinked open, and sunlight pierced them like another needle. There was a painful prickling in every part of his body and he groaned when he tried to move his feet. He was lying, without his coat and shoes, on a hospital bed, and a young man in a white jacket was standing beside him.

"You wake up again? Good." He looked down at Kerry, chuckling. "What happened to you? A touch of the sun? Well, we're all more or less crazy these days. I'm afraid you'll be stiff and sore for a few days; those neuron-guns are no joke."

He beckoned to a nurse, who brought a sterile tray. The interne rolled back Kerry's sleeve, dabbed at it and jabbed him again with a needle.

Kerry's lips were still stiff. He put up his hand and rubbed at them and managed to mumble, "What's that?"

"Neurotone," the interne said. "If you have much muscular pain, see your own doctor and get another shot." He turned to someone just outside the door. "He's all right now. He must have caught it right in the chest. Good thing you have a strong heart, Mr. Donalson. A man your age doesn't want to take too many shocks like that."

A policeman stood hesitant in the doorway. "Listen, Mister," he said, "I'm sorry I had to shoot you, only don't you *never* run away when a policeman yells at you. You *know* we can't take chances with the Pharigs!"

"You needn't apologize, Sergeant," said another voice behind him.

Kerry, stooping to lace his shoes, straightened and swung his feet over the edge of the bed. He looked up at Commander Lal, who made a dismissing motion at the policeman.

"A guilty conscience is a very bad thing to have around a police station, Mr. Donalson," said Commander Lal. "If you had waited for a minute you would have known there was no charge against you. And just to relieve your mind I may add that you will be perfectly free to leave here in half an hour. However, I must first request the favor of an interview."

Downstairs in a small, windowless office, the commander took a seat behind a battered desk, obviously not his own, and gestured Kerry to a chair.

"Before we begin," he said

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quietly, "I want to make one thing clear. Ben Thrusher was brought here at his own request—a statement which the members of your family can verify. At the last moment, I believe he didn't want to make trouble for you by dying in your house."

His eyes, dark and level and severe, met those of Kerry across the desk. "I assure you that you are in no personal danger," he said. "On the other hand, it is absolutely imperative that we keep you from making—shall we say—irresponsible statements."

The door to an inner office opened, and Lew Fallon, escorted by Night Police, came in. He looked a trifle rumpled and sinister, with a torn collar and the traces of a bloody nose, and he was accompanied by a man whose face Kerry dimly recognized before memory could put a name to him. He was Paul Chapman, the Australian rocketry expert who had dropped out of sight at the same time as Ben Thrusher. He was bandaged like Ben, and battered and toothless. But he was recognizable.

Commander Lal dropped a crumpled piece of paper on the desk. "I believe that you'll want to reconsider before printing this," he said.

Kerry did not need to look at it to know that it was the editorial and rough draft of the news story he had written. He crushed it in his hand.

Lew Fallon said bitterly, "I did the best I could, Mr. Donalson. Ben's dead now. Like my Dad. And for what?"

"Be quiet, Lew," said Doctor Chapman in a resonant voice which had a little of the same blurred quality as Ben's, but was made sharper by an accent of authority. "We appreciate what you did for Ben. Only—"

"Only it was the wrong thing," the commander interrupted. "We all appreciate it, and I, perhaps, most of all. But your mistaken kindness killed him, Fallon."

He leaned forward slightly, and said, "I shall be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Donalson. If you were a farmer, or a plumber, or the manager of a cigar store, we would let you talk all you pleased, for we could be quite sure that no one would listen. We could always have you confined—briefly of course—in a mental institution, as a precaution against anyone believing you. Or at the worst—" he paused. "At the worst we could have you listed as—another Pharig casualty."

Fallon burst out, "And they call this a free world!"

The commander ignored him. "There are laws against inciting to riot," he said slowly, as if searching for the right words. "And you are in the peculiar position of having a large communications medium at your command. I assure you we would have no compunctions about invoking those laws against you. However, we hope such drastic action may not be necessary.

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"At present, there are four other newspapers in your exact position. One in Buenos Aires, one in Dallas, Texas, one in Bombay and one in Sheffield, England. To the owners and editors of these newspapers, we have made the identical revelation we are making to you. Ben Thrusher was right. *There are no Pharigs.* There never were any."

"So Ben was right," Dr. Chapman repeated, looking hard at Kerry. We've actually got a military dictatorship."

Commander Lal said, "We had a military dictatorship after the Three Days' War—or rather, we had two of them. The Asian Alliance—we freely admit it—were planning to use plague germs in the next war, and I don't believe even your most rabid nationalists would deny that the Free Americas were making rocket-bombs with radiocobalt warheads. Atomic war is a lemming urge, and it would at least have remedied our worst problem—overpopulation. Natural resources were going fast. Coal and oil were virtually gone, and we had to save the heavy isotopes for space flight, or we'd never get off the earth, and die on a worn-out planet."

He shrugged heavily. "The Pharig invasion was a desperate expedient. The so-called military decision not to use H-bombs on the invaders was another. Actually, all the thermonuclear weapons had been dismantled to replace dwindling power resources until we could get workable solar power—and to conserve something for space flight."

"If you were saving heavy metals for space flight," Kerry asked bluntly, "why did the Earth United pigeonhole Ben Thrusher's space drive?"

Dr. Chapman started to answer, but the commander asked bluntly, "Do you know what the birth rate is?"

Kerry didn't. "I understood," he remarked with sarcastic emphasis, "that it was a statistic that could give aid and comfort to the enemy."

"Any development of a new frontier tends to raise the birth rate explosively. That's fine. When we open the planets we'll need a high birth rate. But after the Three Days' War—you remember—the crime wave was so terrific that both the Americas and the Asian Alliance had to throw their whole armies into policing.

"With the high birth rate and scarce food supplies, most families couldn't get along unless both parents worked. With neglected children—and too few schools and teachers—crime skyrocketed. The emergency—even a non-existent one from outer space—let us pass drastic laws which the public wouldn't have accepted in peacetime. Food rationing. Conversion of luxury crops to food raising. The non-worker law for mothers of families. That was unpopular,

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but it did cut down juvenile crime!"

"And the curfew law," Kerry said. "If there are no Pharigs, that's tyranny."

"You're perfectly right," the commander said. "But the Night Police drain off the unemployed population. It's cheaper to pay them, as a civilian army, than to maintain prison systems and public welfare programs. If a man is unemployed or unemployable, he goes in the Night Police and it's up to him and his intelligence whether he sweeps the streets or becomes responsible for the peace of a whole city."

"So that was it!" Fallon muttered.

Commander Lal rose restlessly and paced the room. "The curfew lights—crimes were worked mostly in darkness—brought the crime rate down right away. Getting rid of unemployment and starvation took away all excuse for crimes. There are no more victims of society. The only criminals now are those who commit crimes of passion, and we don't need to be sentimental about them any more. Most crime is prevented and the rest can be punished effectively. Attributing all crimes of violence to the Pharigs made crime, in the public eye, equivalent to saying *inhuman* or *alien,* and destroyed the superficial glamor around crime and violence."

Dr. Chapman raised a hand and made the very protest that was on Kerry's lips. "But in a free society, certainly man has inherent rights and freedoms."

The commander looked tired. "Yes. But freedom exists only where there is elbowroom for a man to move without gouging his neighbor's ribs. We just don't have it on Earth any more. And all idealistic statements to the contrary, no honest man *needs* that kind of freedom in these days.

"Men have short working hours and ample leisure. Any further freedom is license we can't afford. We've had to keep the population fed and in order until we can find living space or a differential method of birth control. I mean by that, a way to lower the birth rate without also lowering the rate of intelligence-per-thousand."

He looked at Kerry. "We could use your help."

"To keep on hoaxing the people?"

"No, to un-hoax them, if that is an allowable expression." Commander Lal returned to his seat. "The Pharig invasion is almost over. When we get out into space, it will be simply to stage a few mock battles and defeat them conclusively—and forever."

Fallon demanded "But why not tell them the truth?"

The Indian propped his elbows on the desk. He seemed worn out with his long explanation. The blazing insignia of Earth United seemed a glaring anachronism on his austere frame.

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"There is an Indian proverb," he began slowly, "concerning the man who rode a tiger. He couldn't stay on and he was afraid to get off. Now that we're on the verge of leading the people of Earth out into space suppose we did reveal that the Pharig invasion was a hoax staged for our own purposes. Then suppose we met a *real* alien race?"

"Good lord!" said Kerry.

"It's entirely possible."

Chapman said, "I suppose history must eventually look at the Pharig invasion as a kind of air-raid drill."

"Yes," the Indian agreed, "To see whether Earthmen were capable of putting aside their individual concerns and functioning as a united world." With an apologetic smile he touched the insignia he wore.

Somehow to Kerry it seemed that the insignia was insignificant now and the man himself was the symbol of a greater power. Kerry slowly crumpled the editorial he still held in his hand, shredded it and dropped the pieces on the desk.

"You win, Commander."

Fallon said, "But Ben—and my father. What about them?"

"Ben Thrusher was a martyr," Commander Lal said. He looked sorrowful, almost shaken. "But he was a martyr only to a lie. Go and write that editorial over again, Donalson. Make it an obituary instead, and make it good. Ben Thrusher—and Doctor Fallon too—deserved it. Say, if you want to, that they gave their lives for space flight. It's true and they ought to rest in peace. Because the discovery of space flight means the end of the Pharigs. I'm not in a mood to think up famous last words."

So even Ben's death was to be converted to the sober uses of expediency.

"Maybe his own last words would do!" Kerry said bitterly. "'They make a wilderness and call it peace!'"

The commander swung around. "Tacitus," he said. "The words of a barbarian chief inciting his tribe to revolt against Rome. But Rome won, even though the barbarians sacked her. She kept peace, of a kind, until the very barbarians who destroyed her found time to repent and admire what they'd destroyed, and a few of them remembered enough to preserve what they could.

"Even the decadence of Rome was valuable in its way, and so are the curfew and Night Police. If they lasted, it would be genuine decadence. It's almost over. The day of the barbarians and pioneers will begin again when the first rocket reaches Mars. But we've accomplished something."

Lal pointed to the recruiting sign on the office wall, which Kerry and the others had taken so much for granted that they had not even noticed it.

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"That sign means something," the commander said. "Even Ben Thrusher would have admitted that. Although he died fighting it."

And Kerry left with the first lines of the obituary already ringing in his head: "A martyr to the desire for freedom, Benedict Thrusher, listed as a dead man for eight years, died today after wresting from the Pharigs the secret of the space drive that will mean their eventual extermination from Earth . . ."

And all the rest is written in history.

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the movie-makers

by . . . Henry Slesar

Was it the future's very own contribution to the gentle art of blackmail? Or was it really something far more terrifying?

MRS. VERA SAVILLE, wife of the great physicist, was a widow of five days before she asked her friend and adviser Martin Bruchner for the answer to a troubled question.

"Why did my husband kill himself?" she said, as they sat in the darkened library of the Saville home.

"Vera," said Bruchner painfully. "Surely you must know."

"I know his mind was failing him, Martin. If that's what you mean."

Bruchner went to the fireplace and rested his arms on the high mantel. "That's tragedy enough—for a man of John's nature. Approaching the end of one of the most significant theorems in physics, and then—" He took an andiron in his hand and poked idly at a clump of ashes.

"They say he felt guilty," said the woman softly. "The newspapers stressed that. They say he was concerned with the danger that might arise from the practical applications of his space-heat theory."

"It's not impossible, Vera," said

We've almost invariably found that if a young man goes quite far in the adververtising field—Henry Slesar is a creative director of a leading advertising concern—he can be depended upon to display unusual talent in the science fantasy field. He must first, of course, turn his creative energies in that direction. This Mr. Slesar has done—presumably in his "spare" time—and a more exciting story than this it has seldom been our privilege to publish.

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her friend. He reseated himself and took her limp fingers in his hand. "Do I have to tell you what John was like? He wasn't a worldly man. Yet he felt for the world so deeply—"

"A gap-filler, he used to call himself," said Vera Saville reminiscently. "Plugging up the holes of ignorance. Do you know how many years he spent as a youth, just in an effort to add one percentage point to the elements table?"

Martin Bruchner had made peace with his emotions several days before. But now the old woman's mournful face and melancholy voice stirred the carefully-banked fire of grief, and the flames began to mount again. His eyes moistened, and he fought the return of tears with an angry speech.

"Do you realize what kind of military end could evolve from John's theory?" he said, almost savagely. "Did you see the *Newsweek* interview with General Fletcher? 'A planet wrapped in flame!' That's a horrifying way to employ a theory, isn't it, Vera? Well, that's the sort of thing John had to cope with. A lesser man might have been proud of himself. A more ascetic man might have shut the world out of his laboratory. But I'm not describing your husband now, am I?"

"No," said the woman dully. "John *cared*."

"Yes, he cared," Bruchner said intensely. "And he paid the price of caring. These last six months—" He squeezed her hand. "They must have been terrible months for you, my dear."

"I'm not sure," said Mrs. Saville strangely. "I knew John was different. He had become so vague, so forgetful. And he left the house so frequently. Every day, for hours. I don't know where he went."

"It was the same at the University," said Bruchner. "He rarely did any work. Even the simplest mathematical propositions confused him suddenly. It was as if he was resisting—" He stood up suddenly and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Listen, Vera," he said. "There's something else we've got to talk about. I know you'll find it unpleasant, but it has to be done. We have some legal matters to clear up, you and I, and we might as well get it over with."

"Legal matters?" she answered uncertainly.

"Oh, you know. We have to probate the will, for one thing. And then there's John's insurance. Several other matters. It's best we take care of them now, especially if you plan to move—I mean, to spend some time with your sister."

"Yes, of course," Mrs. Saville replied. "You are quite right. You will help me, Martin?"

"Naturally," said Bruchner, smiling wanly. "Our most important immediate task is to get John's papers together. The things he has in the vault."

"All right," she said. "I'll do it tonight."

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"Fine." Bruchner took his hat and coat from the chair and started for the doorway. "I'll come around tomorrow afternoon and we'll look them over together. Meanwhile, you should get some sleep. Didn't Dr. Kahn give you some pills?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Saville. "I'll do as you say, Martin. Thank you for coming. Thank you very much."

THE DARKNESS deepened in the library, the night filling out the shadows surrounding the old woman as she sat unmoving in the chair by the fireplace. Then, with an audible sigh, she got up and turned on a table lamp beneath a portrait of Isaac Newton.

She moved the painting aside, uncovering the round wall safe underneath. It took her a full minute to open it, for manipulating the combination had been John's function ordinarily. The contents of the safe bulked large, much to her surprise, and emptying it took several more minutes.

She shook her head despairingly at the mound of documents, and slowly began to sort them out on the scarred antique table, which was ringed with the outline of a thousand cups of coffee she and her husband had shared together. Some of the papers were incomprehensible to her, and these she set aside for Bruchner's perusal the following afternoon. Then she came upon a cancelled letter attached to a small, leather-bound notebook with a thick rubber-band.

She looked at the long white envelope curiously, remembering the day it had been delivered. How many months ago had that been? There was something unusual about it, and she tried to recall why.

Of course! She remembered suddenly with a puzzled smile. Opening and reading the morning mail had been one of their pleasant little rituals. They would sit in the sunroom over a leisurely breakfast, reading each letter aloud—even reading the advertisements and bills. But for some inexplicable reason, John had never shared this particular piece of mail with her. She wondered why now, frowning with puzzlement as she scanned the envelope.

There was no return address, and the letter was postmarked Boston. She withdrew the stapled sheets of paper inside, and noting the absence of a letterhead, began to read the typewritten words.

Dear Mr. Saville:

Your interest is kindly solicited towards a unique proposition we would like to offer you.

Unknown to you, and by means of a process hitherto thought impossible, our organization has been photographing your life since the date of your birth on October 2nd, 1940.

As a scientist, you are certain to realize the enormous complexity of such a photographic undertaking, and the amount of research required to unearth the radical new concepts involved. Nevertheless,

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our firm has perfected this process over several generations of scientific study, and we are now attempting to realize some profit as reimbursement for the inevitably great expense we have incurred.

To this end, we are offering private showings of these films to the selected group of individuals upon whom we have been experimenting. We plan to limit these showings to one hour daily, and are forced to charge a minimum fee of $25 per visit. The films will be projected at our own offices at 430 Oak Road, Carrington, Massachusetts, which is eighteen miles north of Boston.

We cannot help but feel that you will be greatly interested in seeing once again the memorable moments of your life—re-living, so to speak, your days of greatest happiness and success. We are sure you will take especial delight in recapturing the days of your courtship with your lovely wife, Vera, and of seeing in exact detail the hours of scientific triumph which has earned you the honor and respect of the world.

The films have remarkable clarity, and are in full color. There is a multi-groove sound-track which reproduces sound with unusually high fidelity.

If you are interested in a trial session, we would be delighted to have you pay a call at our offices on Thursday of this week, at 10 A.M.

There is one other consideration upon which we must insist. Due to the obvious fact that publicity about our process would encourage curiosity from the press, we ask that you maintain complete secrecy about our organization. We are not yet willing to make our methods public, and premature recognition would greatly inhibit our ability to profit from this venture. For this reason, we are forced to request that no one, not even your closest kin, be informed about the contents of this letter, or the nature of your visits to our offices.

We are looking forward to seeing you on Thursday, and can assure you that you will not be disappointed by what you will find here.

The letter was signed: HOWARD FRANK, *Vice-President, Life Films, Inc.*

Mrs. Saville sat for a few minutes in utter silence, the incredible letter in her lap. She removed her glasses and closed them carefully. The proposal she had just read was certainly extraordinary, and she knew how it would have intrigued her husband, with his exaggerated sense of curiosity. But surely it was some kind of clever hoax?

She picked up the leather notebook, certain that it was in some way connected with the almost unbelievable communication. She was right. The first page bore the date of the Thursday following the letter's arrival. The page was covered with John Saville's economical scrawl, and she was probably the only person on earth who could

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decipher it so readily. The notes read:

June 2, 1991

This has been rather an astonishing day and worthy of being recorded in a special journal, of which this is the first entry. One hour ago, I returned from a small town called Carrington, some eighteen miles from the city of Boston. I have spent this morning in a ramshackle frame house at the outskirts of the town, whose interior has been converted into a modern, office-like arrangement of some four rooms. In one of these rooms I have been watching myself as a youth of twenty-eight, attending a small gathering at the home of a man who has been dead for eight years.

I realize that I am writing with unscientific detachment, but this experience has shaken my soul like dice in a gambler's cuff, and the emotional man inside me has wrested control from the scientific man who normally occupies my consciousness. But I will try to start at the beginning.

It all began with the letter which I have secured to this journal. Upon receipt of this communication my attitude was one of—how shall I describe it?—amused interest, perhaps. I decided to accept the terms of the offer as stated, and refrained from telling even my wife of my destination this morning.

I took the car and drove up to Carrington myself. It was a pleasant drive. The trees are wonderfully lush this year, displaying a luxuriance seldom encountered so early in June. It was a satisfying experience, I told myself, even if I was destined to find nothing but an empty hoax at the end of my travels. As it turned out, of course, I found a great deal more.

I arrived at the address given me at approximately ten-thirty, but the gentleman who answered the door gave me no need to apologize for my lateness. He was a tall, extremely thin man of indeterminate age—possibly forty. He wore a rather shapeless suit of clothes, but he was pleasant enough, and he welcomed me inside warmly.

He introduced himself to me as David Morrison, and led me into an inner office. There I met the author of the letter—Howard Frank. The two men were almost as alike as twin brothers, and I deduced that Life Films, Incorporated, was a family affair.

"I shall be interested in your reaction to my letter," Mr. Frank said to me when I had taken a seat directly facing him. "I imagine you read it with some skepticism."

I confessed that such indeed had been the case.

"I am not at all surprised," said Mr. Frank, smiling. He offered me some brandy, which I gratefully accepted. (I beg Dr. Kahn's pardon for this lapse, but it seemed in keeping with the spirit of the adventure.) "I must say, however," he continued, "that no one has ever left disappointed."

The other man signalled silently,

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and Mr. Frank stood up. "No need to delay the business at hand," he said cheerfully. "Will you come this way, Dr. Saville?" I reached for my checkbook, but he stopped me with an urgent gesture. "No, no," he said. "Please. No payment until after you have seen one of our films. And I neglected to tell you that we prefer our fees in cash."

I followed the two men through a doorway and into another room, holding back an odd feeling of excitement. The room was in total darkness and the light switch which Mr. Morrison flicked on merely produced a soft yellow glow that was not strong enough to enable me to see much of its interior.

After a while, my eyes became accustomed to the dimness, and I could make out a narrow, low-ceilinged room which contained nothing but a large, overstuffed armchair, and a standing ash-tray with a massive base, and a bowl of burnished bronze. The side walls were covered by strange round "portholes" a foot or so in diameter, and I believed I could detect some electronic apparatus behind their glass faces. But the owners of Life Films, Incorporated gave me no time to investigate.

In a moment, they had me seated in the armchair, and I must admit that it was as comfortable as the friendliest seat in my own home. Another switch was flicked on, and the far wall directly opposite me suddenly became a glowing white rectangle. This, of course, was a view screen. But it was so remarkably white that I was forced to shade my eyes from its glare.

"Now if you'll just make yourself at home," Mr. Frank said, "we'll proceed with our demonstration. We shall want to know first, of course, what period of your life you are most interested in seeing."

I had already determined what I would say on the trip up to Carrington. "I'm afraid I don't recall the precise date," I told him. "But it was around the middle of May, in nineteen sixty-eight. It was the day I first met my wife, Vera. Do you think you can locate the exact film?"

Actually, I felt like a fool in just asking the question, but the rules of this game were theirs.

"Of course," said Mr. Morrison smoothly. "It won't be any trouble."

"It was a small party," I told them, "at the home of a Mr. Hugh Donato—a colleague of mine at the University. He died many years ago."

"It will take just a few minutes," said Mr. Frank. "Just relax. I'm sure we will have no trouble in locating the film you mention."

They moved the ash tray a bit closer to my chair, and left the room. I sat there for some five minutes, feeling silly, and not a little drowsy. For a moment I toyed with the idea of investigating the peculiar orifices that lined the room

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on both sides. But I quickly decided it wouldn't be "cricket" under the circumstances. I leaned back in the chair, squinting up at the brilliant whiteness of the screen.

Then the colors appeared.

Lord! What the Hollywood and television people wouldn't give to duplicate the marvelous process that produced those colors! At first, they were faint pastels, and then they shone forth with all their amazing fidelity. Only the human eye could have exceeded their perfection, the depth and magnificence of their contrasting greens, yellows and blues.

When the colors finally became shapes, the screen held a picture of a room I haven't seen in forty years.

It was Hugh Donato's living room, beyond any possible doubt. How could I have failed to recognize that big, ugly, square room, with its incongruous walls of wood paneling and flowered wallpaper? There was the very sofa that Hugh's wife, Deborah, had bought at some ridiculous price at a rigged country auction. How Hugh had moaned to us about that! There was the same blackened old fireplace, with its Modigliani print, sooty and hung askew over the mantel. There was his wife's precious collection of whatnots, and Hugh's battered bookcase, with the works of Bulwer-Lytton precariously balanced on top.

And there were people in the room. Why, there was old Hugh himself—looking not a day over forty! My God, would there ever be a face so animated again? And there was his wife, Deborah—a pretty, brittle thing. Nobody really liked her. And Professor Mills! That old pontifical windbag! And Jane Anderson! What a handsome woman she was before . . .

Then I realized that I could actually *hear* their voices, and I leaned forward eagerly in my chair, to catch the sound of a conversation long relegated to memory.

Yet I actually heard very little, for the scene suddenly shifted towards the old bay window of the Donato living room. Standing there quietly, in isolation, was a young girl in a gray cashmere sweater, looking lost, and lovely, and supremely wonderful. Need I write that my eyes filled with tears when I saw Vera, my wife—unchanged by time's tyranny.

And now I was approaching her.

"Hello," my voice said.

"Hello," she answered shyly. "You must be Professor Saville."

"Hardly," I said, and I could feel my self-conscious blush all over again. "I'm not a full professor yet. Not for a while."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It sounds good, Miss—?"

"Peterson. Vera Peterson. I'm in vocational guidance."

"Do you know that you're squinting, Miss Peterson?"

"What?"

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"You're definitely squinting, young lady."

"Why—I don't know what you mean!"

"You know very well what I mean. I've seen you at the University, and if I remember correctly, you're always wearing glasses. Where are they now?"

"Well . . . they're in my purse, if you really want to know."

"I think you ought to wear them."

"You do?"

"Certainly. How else can you know what I look like? I might be a veritable Mr. Hyde, for all you know. On the other hand, I might have just the kind of impudent charm you may like."

She laughed. "All right," she said. "You've convinced me." She reached into her handbag and produced her spectacles. She put them on, and looked up at me coquettishly. "Well. You're not Mr. Hyde," she said. "But I don't know about that impudent charm!"

"You know something?" I said: "You should never worry about wearing those glasses. I mean, all the time. Nothing in the world could hide the beauty of your eyes."

My hour was up, and much too soon. The colors faded away, and the screen went blank.

The owners of Life Films, Incorporated appeared to be understanding people. They allowed me some minutes alone to recover my equanimity, and wipe away my tears.

Then they returned, and asked me if I had enjoyed the film. I replied that I had, and asked them when I might come to Carrington again.

"Anytime, Dr. Saville," said Mr. Frank. "Tomorrow, if you like. There is no limit to the number of films we can show you. And by the way—to set your mind at rest—we allow no one but the subject himself to see these films. You are assured of complete privacy."

I thanked them very much, and gave them twenty-five dollars in bills. Then I went out to my car.

It was not until I had driven out of the driveway of 430 Oak Road that the full import of what had occurred struck me. I knew that I had just witnessed a great scientific mystery. But to be frank, my mind dwelt more on the personal aspects of the discovery. And as I write these words, I am trembling with impatience for the morning, and my next visit.

The next entry was dated June 22.

Shall I tell Vera what I have seen? Shall I jeopardize this opportunity to relive my life in the strangest of all possible ways? I am caught up in an inner conflict that cries out for resolution. How have they performed this miracle? What wizardry has allowed them to put on film my every living deed, without my knowledge? What a contribution to the world's knowledge these two business-like gentlemen could make if they should de-

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cide to reveal their astounding method! And how can I, a scientist, remain silent?

And yet, I am so deeply entangled in the net they have cast that I lack the will to do anything. Is entangled the word? No. I am doped, drugged, a hopeless victim to the narcotic spell of these incredible films. Every hour I have spent in the Carrington projection room has been infinitely precious to me. The past has become more real and more important to me than the present.

Today I spent an hour with my father—a happy hour on a transcontinental Pullman, sitting in the dining car, watching the towns and farms of America flash past the window. My father had some interesting tale or legend to recount about almost every re-visited vista, for his engineering work had given him the opportunity to know every state in the Union with a hometown familiarity. His comments on the natural beauty of the countryside were fascinating to my fourteen-year-old mind.

How wonderful it was to have seen my father again! No, I must amend that—not merely to have seen him. I have photographs, and even jerky home movies of my father. This was different. This was a precious hour actually re-lived.

How could I surrender such delights—even in the name of science?

July 8

I am learning so much about myself. The Life Films process may well exert a transforming influence on psychoanalysis—if and when its inventors decide to release it to humanity. I have had revealed to me aspects of my personality I scarcely knew existed. And if I ever truly believed myself to be a humble man I seriously doubt that I appraised my character correctly.

I have now prevailed upon Mr. Frank and Mr. Morrison to parade before me the moments of scientific tribute which I have enjoyed in the past. I have watched myself accorded tributes usually reserved for popular entertainers—tributes that once embarrassed and confused me. Yet now I find myself treasuring every one of those occasions, recalling with unhealthy satisfaction every award and commendation which the ablest scientists of our day were so eager to confer upon me. I am ashamed of my immodest interest, and yet I cannot claim that I do not enjoy reliving those flattering hours.

I am aware that my attendance at Carrington is threatening the security and happiness of my home. My unexplained disappearances are disturbing Vera greatly, but my wife is the understanding woman she always was, and asks no questions. Even more disturbing, however, is my diminishing interest in my work. The space-heat theory is so close to completion. It would be unforgivable to allow my efforts to lag because of my need for a

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solace that I cannot regard as altogether worthy.

August 10

Today I spent what was probably my most trying four or five hours since my first visit to the Carrington projection room.

I have become dismayed by my inability to work. It has become so vital and tormenting a concern that it has actually impaired my health, and Vera is insisting that I consult Dr. Kahn. My colleagues are equally aware of my failing mental powers, and they are obviously worried. Sometimes, I feel like some poor C student, struggling with the intricacies of calculus. I have read and re-read my notes, but they seem to make little sense—seem, in fact, to be the work of some other man.

On the drive to Carrington this morning I was struck by an inspiration. Didn't the files of Life Films, Incorporated contain every waking hour of my life—including the long, secluded hours when I had been engaged in formulating the space-heat theory? Watching the films, why could I not quickly reorientate myself to the foundations of my work? It would be a "refresher" course—and I would be my own instructor!

I went ahead with the plan—and this morning I viewed the scene in my library when I had at first seen the glimmer of sense in my mathematical formulae. The blackboard covered with equations was a friendly sight, and as I studied it eagerly elation came upon me.

I left Carrington afterwards with a sense of well-being. But then, as I arrived home and made myself a makeshift lunch at 2 p.m., the dreadful truth occurred to me. It had all been so clear—earlier in the day in the projection room. Each equation had made sense, and had integrated beautifully into the over-all pattern. But now, sitting in the quiet kitchen, the film seemed like a long-forgotten dream—a hazy memory from the distant past. The cosmic sense of all I had seen on that blackboard had become a meaningless half-formed jumble of ideas. I could recall nothing—absolutely nothing!

September 13

I did not go to Carrington today. The effort was monumental. I left the house as usual, not wanting the change in my routine to be noticed by my wife. Instead, I drove the car through the countryside, in an effort to clear my clouded brain. But the attempt was unsuccessful. I could think of nothing but the narrow room at Carrington and the brilliant white screen that brought my past into view again. A thousand glorious hours, came into my mind, and I craved the comfort of the armchair and the screen like an addict must crave heroin. Those hours are now essential to my existence. I must have them at any cost.

October 2

My mother was a beautiful

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woman. I've always thought so and now I am sure of it. She was like some golden angel, with long blonde tresses and gentle hands. She died when I was not yet five years old, but I have spent an unforgettable hour with her on this, my birthday. I wept like an infant when the lights returned to the Carrington projection room, and even now, driving through the countryside, my eyes cloud as I remember. Oh, God! If only *they* would leave me alone! My so-called friends and now—even my wife. Why must they trail me about like sad-eyed dogs, nagging me about my health, troubling me about every move I make. Why can't they accept my actions? Why can't they leave me alone?

Vera Saville wept as she read this entry in Dr. Saville's journal. Then she wiped her eyes and turned the page, to the last entry in the book. It was dated November 2nd—just six days before her husband had committed suicide—put a bullet in his brain.

My hand is shaking. I can barely write these words. Today I have heard terrible news. I cannot quite believe it. I shudder to think of what tomorrow will be like when—when the reality of what has occurred *must* be accepted. Mr. Frank has told me that they will be unable to show me any more films. I offered them more money—a considerable sum of money. But they would not accept it. They were terribly apologetic, but the excuse they gave did not satisfy me. I pleaded with them, humbled myself, tried to convey to them how terrible my predicament had become. They were sorry, but it was unavoidable. They were moving to another city, and nothing could be done. I begged them to tell me where they were going, but they would not.

What shall I do? They are taking the crutch out from under my crippled life. They are destroying me . . .

The rest of the pages were blank.

Vera Saville sat in her chair, numbly, for what seemed a small portion of eternity. Then she placed the journal back on the table, and went slowly to the telephone. She spoke briefly to her friend, Martin Bruchner, asking a delay of one day before they examined the documents from her husband's safe.

Then she returned to her chair, took the letter from its envelope again, and jotted down the address on a small slip of paper: *430 Oak Road, Carrington, Massachusetts.*

THE MAN WHO answered the door in response to Vera's ring was tall and thin, and he seemed a little startled by her appearance at their doorstep.

"I'm Mrs. Saville," she said. "I think you knew my husband, Dr. John Saville."

"Yes, of course," the man said, a bit flustered. "Please come in."

She went inside. The man, whom she knew would be David Morri-

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son, seated her in the outer room, and asked her to wait. He disappeared through a doorway, and when he returned, it was with another man who resembled him.

"This is Mr. Frank," he said, and she gravely shook hands. "Mr. Frank is our managing Vice-President."

"Is there anything we can do for you, Mrs. Saville?"

"I know what you're thinking," she said. "You think John disobeyed your instructions. But you are wrong. He kept a journal of his visits here, and I found it after he —after his death."

"You have our deepest sympathies, Mrs. Saville," said Mr. Morrison. "Your husband was a great man."

"Thank you," she said with bitterness. "You should know, of course. I've read about your films. It's difficult for me to believe that such a thing can be done. But as the wife of a scientist, I have more liberal ideas, perhaps, concerning what is possible."

"It's certainly possible, Mrs. Saville. Your husband—"

"My husband *died* because of your ingenuity, Mr. Frank!" She spoke sharply, but her voice quavered. "Surely you must realize that!"

"Mrs. Saville, please!" Mr. Frank put his hand out pleadingly.

"They destroyed his will," she said. "They were a drug to him—and then you cut them off. Are you proud of your enterprise?"

The man's extended hand now touched her shoulder. "Mrs. Saville, you must hear our side of the story. I know you're overwrought, but we deserve a hearing."

"That's why I've come," she said softly. "I want to know how you can justify what you've done!"

"Please hear us out," said Mr. Morrison. "You'll understand a good deal more."

"You may be even angrier when you hear it," said Mr. Frank. "But you deserve the explanation."

"Very well," said the woman.

Mr. Frank seated himself. "Mrs. Saville," he began softly, "there *are* no films."

"What?"

"We are not movie-makers, Mrs. Saville. There has been no photographic record made of your husband's life."

"But his journal—"

"Things are not what they seem," said Mr. Morrison. "Our people have learned many things, but this is not one of them."

"I don't understand!"

"Your husband saw his past," said Mr. Frank. "Just as his journal told you. But the method was somewhat different from what he thought. It had to be—and we couldn't tell him the truth for fear it would reveal our purpose."

"What purpose?"

"The purpose of peace," Mr. Morrison said gravely.

"Your husband was on the verge of an important discovery," Mr. Frank explained. "A discovery that

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our people of Letisan have been aware of for many centuries."

"Letisan?" Mrs. Saville's confusion showed in her eyes.

"That is not the name you give our world, Mrs. Saville," said the tall man. "It is a planet of a sun not too distant from yours—as measured, at least, in terms of possible attainment. Some day, your people will reach us, just as we have reached you. And when that day comes, we will welcome you peaceably, if you come in peace."

"This is incredible—"

"Incredible, perhaps—in this year, this century. But we are given to the long view, Mrs. Saville, and that is why we have been sent here—to prevent your husband's theory from being born before its time."

"Prevent it?" Mrs. Saville said in horror. "Is that what you've been doing? Did you plan to kill my husband?"

"No, no!" said Morrison plaintively. "We do not kill."

"Our purpose was not to kill Dr. Saville. Please believe us. All we wanted to do was to make him *forget*."

"How? By destroying his mind?"

"That was not our intention. We hoped to have him forget only enough to make completion of his work impossible." Mr. Frank stood up. "Come with me, Mrs. Saville. I want to show you our 'projection' room."

The men lead her through a doorway, and then through another. They entered the narrow room with its mysterious glass portholes.

"Here is where your husband watched scenes from his past. But not on films, Mrs. Saville. We have evolved a method for producing from a man's own mind the stored images of his memory. The principles involved are perhaps more complex than your husband's space-heat theory."

"Then—John only *remembered* what he saw?"

"The mind forgets nothing, Mrs. Saville. There is a storehouse in the brain that keeps its treasures well—until some outside force brings them to the fore again. We have discovered that force, and through it Dr. Saville discovered his past. It was a wondrous experience for him, but we expected to be repaid."

"You can't mean the money—"

"The money was only a ruse, to make our enterprise seem legitimate. We would be pleased to return every dollar. We were paid in another kind of coin—the coin of forgetfulness."

Mrs. Saville steadied herself against the wall.

"The effort of extracting the past is a great one," Mr. Frank said. "The price is memory itself. Each hour your husband viewed here would later be forgotten by him in its entirety—no matter how hard he tried to recall it."

"Then you did destroy his mind," she said numbly.

"In the interest of peace," said

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Mr. Morrison. "Please don't lose sight of our purpose, Mrs. Saville."

"And when you were through with him," the woman said tearfully, "you tossed the shell aside!"

"We must return home soon," said Mr. Frank sadly. "Our task is ended on Earth."

His eyes did not waver.

Vera Saville put her head in her hands and wept openly. The two men watched her unhappily for a while, and then Mr. Frank reached out and put his arms around her thin shoulders to comfort her.

"What shall I do now?" she moaned. "He was just an assignment to you—something to attack and destroy. But he was my husband, my life—" The tears cascaded down her cheeks.

"Please," said Mr. Morrison. "We are not proud of what has happened. Try and understand."

Vera Saville wiped her eyes. She looked up at the two strangers, and then at the armchair in the center of the narrow room. She walked over to it, touching the back with trailing fingers. Then she looked up at them again.

"Very well," she said, controlling the tremor in her voice. "There's nothing I can do about it now. But there *is* something you can do for me."

"Anything, Mrs. Saville," said Mr. Frank.

"I want to see a film," she said.

A young man with a pleasant, cheerful face, and a Martini in his hand, smiled at the girl in the gray cashmere sweater. She laughed back.

"All right," she said. "You've convinced me." She reached into her handbag and produced a pair of spectacles. She put them on, and looked up at him coquettishly. "Well . . . you're not Mr. Hyde," she said. "But I don't know about that impudent charm."

"You know something?" he said. "You should never worry about wearing those glasses. I mean, all the time. Nothing in the world could hide the beauty of your eyes."

Once a year in leading cities throughout the United States readers of science fiction and the writers and the editors, the artists and bibliophiles, all get together in convivial fashion for a most stirring event. It's called THE WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION *and if you've attended one of these gatherings you won't have to be urged to make your reservations now for the* 14th W. S. F. C., *to be held in New York City from August 31 thru Sept. 3. This convention will have four days of entertainment, including a costume party, a banquet, a S. F. movie preview, speeches, displays, exhibits and many more exciting events, with famed British rocket authority and "Book-of-the-Month Club" writer Arthur C. Clarke as guest of honor. For further details get in touch with World Science Fiction Society, Inc., P. O. Box 272, Radio City Station, New York 19, N. Y., and start planning now for the biggest one yet!*

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the rewrite man

by . . . Ward Moore

A miracle worker who makes too great an effort may alter the very structure of Time itself.

"ONLY a miracle," Jessie had gasped, dying, leaving him with the unfinished sentence.

"Only a miracle," Morgan Voll muttered to himself, thirty years later.

"Something, Mr. Voll?"

The copy boy laid the early edition beside his hand. Next year—if they were both still on the *Gazette*—the boy would call him, carelessly, Morg (Old Morg behind his back), though everyone else in the city room would continue to be respectfully "mistered." He picked up the paper. Once he would have been looking for a byline on the front page, or a feature. Now he read only to see if he had again exposed his incompetence as a rewrite man, and if so, how seriously.

It was buried in the inside pages; he had a sudden cold feeling in his legs and a faint sickness in his stomach. "Jess . . . Jessie . . ." he murmured, but the talisman was rubbed thin and defaced. Once his dead wife's name had been a call for support; now it was a mechani-

Having written a Harper novel with a title that the most blase of readers would almost certainly find electrifying—BREATHE THE AIR AGAIN—*Ward Moore, turned his writing talents to science fantasy and won major accolades for* GREENER THAN YOU THINK, *Sloane Associates, and* BRING THE JUBILEE, *Farrar, Straus & Young and Ballantine Books. Mr. Moore has a style of rare distinction and we sincerely believe him to be one of the most brilliant practitioners in the genre we've ever had the privilege of welcoming to our pages.*

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cal utterance, made out of long habit.

ELDERLY MAN TRAFFIC FATALITY

Victim Struck at First and Pine

George Baker, 73, retired, of 1779 Webster Avenue, was hit at dusk by a car driven by Thurlow W. Handson. He was taken to the Memorial Hospital.

There was nothing wrong with the item, except that the address didn't look right. He was sure he hadn't heard "one seven seven nine; repeat, seventeen seventy nine" over the phone. He searched back through the stack of gray newsprint slips scrawled with soft pencil. Euphemia Lang—no; An unidentified . . . Councilman Henry . . . A rubbish fire of . . . Here it was: Geo Baker 73 ret 9771 Wbstr . . .

Mirror writing. He could picture the skipper's mock sympathy as the ax fell: "Morg, when they begin getting everything backward . . ." At sixty-two he would never get a job on a newspaper again, never get another job at all.

There was a bare chance—Voll knew just how bare it was—the mistake had been the linotyper's. Trembling a little, he got up from the desk and walked across the hall into the composing room. He passed the tables where the ads were being scrupulously checked, to the battery of slanted steel desks where the eye-shaded proofreaders worked.

"Al," he said, manufacturing heartiness, putting his hand on a hunched shoulder.

Al looked up, expertly keeping the cigarette smoke from his eye.

"What's on your mind, Morg?"

"Uh— Could I see the copy on this?" He held out the folded *Gazette*, his thumb indicating the story.

"Wrong?"

"Just wanted a look, Al."

Al grimaced, meaning, You guys louse things up and then come blaming us. "Yeah. Hold it." And began riffling through a stack of galleys pierced by a great spike.

Voll shifted uneasily. A chance in a thousand—a chance in a million—that the printer had transposed the numbers and the proofreader hadn't checked them carefully. The skipper—

"Yeah, here it is. I'll get the copy for you."

He waited, resigned. There were too many people ready to raise a squawk for him to hope the slip might pass unnoticed. The victim's family, the actual residents of 1779 Webster, the—

"Here y'are."

"Much obliged. I'll do as much for you some time."

"Nothing at all." (What could you do for me?) "Beef?"

"No beef, Al. Just—uh—something." He looked down at the typescript, helpless. For of course the item was exactly as it appeared

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in print; the blunder was his alone. "Thanks."

Suppose he caught the error before the later editions? Would that help? He had barely got fresh paper in the mill when his phone sounded. "Voll," he answered.

"Morg? Bert Beatty. Just saw the bulldog. You saved my hide, you genius. How'd you know I flubbed that Baker stiff's address?"

"Wha—?"

"Bum connection. Anyhow I mixed two George Bakers. Quite a follow-up story: second cousins, famliy feud, hadn't spoken for years. Same name, age. They even lived on the same street, only with reversed numbers. One of them—the old coot still living—picketed the city hall about it. Man, listen—"

He wrote down Bert's follow-up absently. Saved! His job was saved by one of those coincidences that happen once in a thousand years. Not only that, but Bert was actually grateful—grateful to *him*—for having caught the switch. No one, not even a legman like Beatty, had owed Voll a favor for years.

By two o'clock, quitting time, the faint warmth in his stomach had gone again. This was always the worst hour, walking through empty streets to the same all-night lunch for the same tasteless food dutifully eaten, going another block to the fusty hotel where his was the shabbiest room. "Jess . . . Jessie . . ."

This was when he sought sleep with whiskey and fought it off with daydreams. The stories he had never shaped, the books unwritten, came now, useful only as material for constructing and reconstructing a life which might have been if Jessie hadn't died at twenty-two. To live widowed for thirty years did no honor to Jessie. A stronger man—he did not balk at the adjective—would have cherished his thoughts of her as part of his life and not narrowed his whole existence to a grisly celebration, a perpetual funeral.

Sitting on his bed with the cloudy tumbler in his hand, staring vacantly at the outdated calendar opposite, he went over the design, never changed, merely elaborated, of an imaginary thirty years in which Jessie grew older (this was hard, but he had once believed himself capable of creating credible characters) without losing her young sureness and wonder. He dreamed of the things he would have done because she knew he could do them, of coming home to her welcome, of falling asleep easily and peacefully beside her, instead of commanding the whiskey to bring unconsciousness.

He always woke with dry mouth and the fear of being fired from the *Gazette*. Afternoons were not for daydreaming; they were passed somnolently, filled with half-formed, chaotic thoughts. He lay in bed late, sometimes with a book whose pages he rarely turned, more often with his hands over his eyes. He

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had no friends, no acquaintances, only the *Gazette*.

II

ON THE DAY after the odd chance of the two George Bakers, he rose with less reluctance than usual, and went almost briskly out to breakfast, the idea of food being for once not repulsive. In the library, his customary retreat until it was time to go to work, he read two chapters of Bishop Berkeley's *Treatise*—a book once engrossing to him, but which he had not read for years—instead of sinking into his usual apathy.

He had hardly settled himself in the city room when he was slapped on the back. An experienced judge of such gestures, he knew this one was not contemptuous (rouse Old Morg up out of his trance) or attention-getting (hard enough to hear anything in here anyway, but you could holler in Old Morg's ear all night and he wouldn't know you were there) or an expression of active dislike (when I see that old mummy sitting there, year after year, I just want to poke him to see if he's still alive). This slap was genial, friendly, even. He turned his head to look up into the plump—yesterday he would have said, fat—face of Bert Beatty.

"Morg! Chum, I'm on the fly—got just a second. The little woman wants you Saturday for chow. Like to see a real newspaperman."

Voll felt the blood warm in his cheek. "Why Bert, I—uh . . ."

"Won't take no for an answer," said Beatty firmly. "Sixish, and bring an appetite; the little woman likes her vittles et."

The jovial affectations—chum, little woman, chow, sixish, vittles et—hardly irritated him. Only the thought of disturbing his routine was disquieting. But not enough to refuse Beatty's invitation; it was easier to break the pattern of habit than the pattern of acquiescence. Reviving half-petrified reflexes, he had his other suit cleaned and his hair cut sooner than usual. He made sure his shirt-collar was unfrayed, and he bought a box of chocolates for his hostess.

Not unexpectedly, the Beattys lived in a studio—that is, a large room with a doublebed disguised as a couch, a couple of bookcases stuffed with books long undusted, a naked phonograph, and a kitchen table with typewriter, dictionary, thesaurus and a confusion of paper, manuscript, letters, clippings, memoranda and other odds and ends. Allowing for the difference in period, it duplicated the room Jessie and he had lived in.

Beatty's wife was plump and wore glasses; she didn't seem to regard Voll as a silly old dodderer. She fussed over him, asked his opinions on subjects of which he knew little, and listened respectfully to his vague replies.

She told him all about Bert's novel, with Beatty only interrupt-

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ing at dignified intervals to explain, No, that wasn't quite right; in fact it was just the opposite. She also told him how publishers, blind to their own interests, had consistently rejected the book ("Well, perhaps not consistently," Beatty said judicially. "Remember the encouraging letter from Macmillan? And someone did burn a cigarette-hole on page two hundred; shows it held the reader's interest that far anyway.") and how Bert was keeping right on in the face of obtuseness and contumely.

It had been years since he felt so close to communicating with other living beings. They drank beer, and he ate with something like zest. He even talked a little about things that had once interested him: the nature of reality, ego and death, will and circumstance.

Later, in his room, the old uneasiness returned. Had he allowed himself to become too vulnerable? He had used to talk like that to Jessie when she was alive. He realized he no longer talked to the imaginary Jessie that way any more, if he ever had.

The dream Jessie had become imperceptibly too fragile, too ethereal, too much—he hesitated and then admitted it—too much a puppet to hear any conversation but the most innocuous billing and cooing or the recital of apocryphal success. Little by little he had sentimentalized and romanticized her, degraded her to the level of a Victorian heroine with set smile and passive ear, a jointed Galatea moving in galvanic jerks instead of the flow of life. Now the musty hotel room disgusted him. He would never have brought the living Jessie to such a place; it was a measure of what he had done to her memory to conjure her up here.

Yet in spite of his disgust the warmth persisted; the whiskey had never been so good, and the daydreams—perhaps because he had shaken the pattern—so vivid. Even back at the desk on Sunday night the warmth stayed with him. It took the form of wishing he could do something for the Beattys. Not that they needed it; they were young and confident. No matter—he would like to help them. As though Old Morg could help anyone . . .

Suppose he— No, it wouldn't do any good anyway. Why should he risk his job for a useless gesture? But a little prestige now might make all the difference in Beatty's future, and the chances of harm to himself were slight. At least he could see what it looked like. He typed:

> *A well-known New York publishing firm is negotiating for a novel written by Bert Beatty,* Gazette *reporter. Beatty, who has—*

Then, before prudence could assert itself, he sent it on. They ran it on page 13, right under the ad for Alcoholics Anonymous. Ap-

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parently no one read it—at least in the early editions—for no summons came to inquire why he was contributing fiction to the staid columns of the *Gazette,* nor did Beatty, calling in the first report of a fire, mention it. Then about eleven, someone was on his phone.

"Mr. Voll? This is Eve Beatty. Do you know where I can find Bert?"

"He's covering a fire at Twenty-second and Snell. Is— I hope there's nothing wrong?"

"Oh no. In fact it's wonderful, really wonderful. A special delivery came from Franklin House. I tried so hard not to open it, but finally I just couldn't hold out. What do you think? They want Bert's book if he'll change the end and rewrite the first half. Isn't it *mar*velous?"

A well-known firm is negotiating, was what he had written, only hoping to give Beatty a trifling boost, a little salve for vanity's sake, sure that no firm, well-known or not, would be interested. And now a well-known firm *was* negotiating.

"M-marvelous," he repeated. "Marvelous." He pulled himself together. "I'm happy for you both. I'll tell Bert to phone you as soon as he calls in."

As soon as she hung up he remembered he'd said nothing about running the story. He'd have to explain to Beatty that he had been struck dumb by the astonishing coincidence. Or, perhaps if he said nothing, Bert mightn't notice that it had been in type before the telegram was opened.

Of course it was ridiculous; like the coincidences in Dickens. You laughed at their absurdity. Morgan Voll, who was rarely known to do more than smile pallidly, laughed. Billsby, who worked next to him, looked over in alarm. Voll laughed again, not so heartily.

"Just thinking," he explained. "Something damned funny."

He'd not had a drink for many hours, but it didn't seem that way. He felt light, airy, irresponsible. Who wouldn't, in a world of absurd coincidences (two George Bakers with reversed street numbers) and crazy puffs turning out true in the face of all probability and reason? If things like this were going to happen he'd try a good one. Really good.

Gravely he addressed the typewriter. Let's see, he thought—five thousand? What's five thousand dollars? Cigarette money. Let's shoot high—ten thousand. Still feeling tight, he wrote without pausing for words. It made a paragraph which would certainly cost him his job if its falsity were discovered, but he was completely reckless.

It read well. It read well enough to be true. The way he felt now it *could* be true; didn't they use to say, I feel like ten thousand dollars? Right at this moment he felt like ten thousand dollars. Actually, however, his exaltation couldn't be measured in monetary terms.

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III

THE WALK TO the hotel sobered him, nor did the whiskey bring back the carefree mood. It had seemed like such a good joke then; now the possible consequences made him shiver. And it wasn't as if he could quietly kill it. The *Gazette* was highly sensitive about such things ever since it had been accused of shielding some politician's reputation.

He thought he had steeled himself, but he was unprepared when Al strolled in from the composing room. "Congratulations, Morg old man. Couldn't happen to a nicer guy."

Voll winced; tried to work his mouth into a smile. "Thanks, Al. It's not much though, when you come right down to it."

"I'd come right down to it any day at all. You and I'll have to get together and baptize it. Drinks on me."

"We'll do that," he said. "Thanks."

"Don't thank me yet, old man. Save it till you hear the sweet deal I'm going to let you in on."

This too, he thought: to be conned out of the non-existent. The paragraph itself, deadly as it was, was anticlimactic when it came.

WINDFALL FOR GAZETTE WRITER

Lost Relative Leaves Legacy

Gazette *staffer Morgan Voll has received a bequest of $10,000 in the will of an eccentric Manhattan recluse of whose existence and kinship Voll was, until now, unaware. Voll says he has no intention of leaving the* Gazette *but plans to continue in—*

He read it with the feeling of being in an elevator with broken cables. How could he have been so stupid (a joke, a funny, funny, *funny* joke) as to do it in the first place, and to bungle it so badly in the second? It wasn't even faintly a surprise to hear the managing editor's voice on the phone and Goodgins say, "I want to see you right away."

What was the use? If he had any guts left he would say calmly, I quit two minutes ago. Instead he shambled down the hall and opened the groundglass door.

Goodgins looked him over with the impersonal relish of a cattle-buyer inspecting a steer. Voll tried to meet the little pale green eyes or even watch the expressive mouth; instead his glance dropped to the freckled hands and arms, covered with red hairs like monkey fur.

"Publishing your autobiography as a serial in the *Gazette?* And for free? Shouldn't we be paying you at least space rates?"

He said nothing. What could he say?

"What the hell kind of a writer are you anyway? I see you have no intention of leaving our little nest.

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This relieves my mind. It will also reassure the stockholders. How could we hope to survive if you left us for *Women's Wear,* or the *Oil and Gas Journal?"*

With nothing more to lose, why was he unable to say, How can any paper survive under you? Or, Aren't you the man the *Times* fired because he couldn't distinguish between Andrew and Dale Carnegie?

"How long have you been a newspaperman?"

It was a trick question; he knew better than to answer it. "Over thirty-five years," he mumbled.

"Well, by God," said Goodgins in awed tones. "Well, by God."

Voll waited.

"Are you by any chance taking a journalism course in your spare time? No, you couldn't be; even in those bloody things they teach you to get the facts. FACTS!" he bawled, making the pudgy hands into fists and hitting the desk with both of them at once as though to drive his point home into Voll's head this vicarious way. "Where are the facts in this preposterous freshman composition? Manhattan recluse—and eccentric to boot! What sex? Age? Name? *I* can deduce she was a she (they never should have given women the vote). Also that she was senile. But our readers, happily, aren't so smart. And even I couldn't figure out what relation she was to you. Grandfather's concubine? Aged uncle's wetnurse? Cousin-germane's deceased wife's sister?"

He stopped banging his fists and threw himself back in his chair. "God knows I'm a reasonable man. A patient man. Write that story over again for the next edition and I'll try to forget this fiasco. But get every damned fact into it this time, and leave the eccentric recluses to the Sunday supplement."

The tyrant was being astoundingly generous. Or perhaps the edge of his wrath was blunted by the thought that he was talking to a man who had just inherited ten thousand dollars and so was no longer at his mercy. If there had been a real story to write, Voll would have been feverishly eager to write it and confirm the reprieve. Again it was bitterly ironical that this unexpected geniality (or calculation) would only expose him more completely.

Sure, he could go back and fill up the blanks with more fiction, but that would only stave off discovery for a day or two—till someone checked the *Gazette* against the New York obits. He had a wild thought of confessing everything, but that would be worse than useless. There was nothing to do but clear out his few personal belongings and leave. They could send his last check to the hotel.

Back at the desk he sank into lethargy. He had worked so desperately to hang on to his job; now he had thrown it away in the most pointless, most absurd fashion.

"Jess . . . Jessie . . ." he whispered hopelessly.

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His phone signaled. This will be my last story, he thought—some trivial, mean incident gabbled by a bored reporter: Joe Doaks, 60, of No Place, attempted suicide but was revived by—

"Mr. Morgan Voll? This is Western Union. I have a telegram for you from New York. 'Relevant portion of Miss Agnes Bewdwick's will reads "to the son of my second cousin's daughter, Mary Louise Voll nee Crabdon, Morgan, I devise, and bequeath the sum of ten thousand dollars free and clear of all taxes and fees which are to be paid out of my residuary estate." Upon receipt of identification we will be pleased to send you a check for this amount. Curtuss, Johansen, Horowitz and Murphy.' Shall I mail you a copy of the message, Mr. Voll?"

"Y—es. Wait a minute. Read it again, will you, please?"

On the third repetition his shaking pencil managed to get it all down. Then he stared at the soft black scrawl. It was true. The unbelievable was true. Whatever he wrote, no matter what he wrote, turned out to be fact.

He had written that a hypothetical Baker had been run down, and Baker turned out not to be hypothetical but real, and had been killed by an automobile, just as he had said. He had reported that Bert Beatty's often-rejected novel had been accepted, and it was. He had sent in the story of his legacy, and it had been verified in detail. At the moment when he had reached the very depths he had acquired the power of wonder-working.

Only a miracle, Jessie had said; now he was a miracle maker. If he wrote that the Antarctic icecap was melting, the Antarctic icecap would melt and the seventh continent be uncovered. If he wrote that men had landed on Mars, they would. If he wrote that human nature had suddenly changed, it would change. Not only would the lion lie down with the lamb, but nations not know war any more.

If he wrote—was that the extent of it? Or only if he wrote for the *Gazette* and the *Gazette* printed his copy? Were his powers unlimited or were they circumscribed by his job? He had dared to test them, not knowing he was testing. Now he must be fully on guard against any more such chances. He was even less free than he had been; it was more vital than ever not to incur the managing editor's displeasure. Quickly, rechecking each detail, he rewrote the story of his legacy from the facts in the telegram.

Another unnerving thought struck him. Suppose Goodgins had merely been playing with him, intending to fire him as soon as he relaxed into some sense of security? It would not be out of character, as experience told him. He seized another piece of copy paper and wrote,

Harold Goodgins, managing

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editor of the Gazette *is resigning to accept a position with the New York* Times. *Mr. Goodgins came to the—*

He picked up the phone. "Morgue . . . Willy? When did the skipper come here? Yes; maybe you'd better get the file. I'll hold on."

The excitement—half satisfaction at the end of Goodgins, half apprehension at the changes a new managing editor could be expected to make—swept the news of Morgan Voll's legacy from all minds but his own. There was only mild reproof for releasing news of the resignation prematurely and sketchily; no one asked him how he had heard about it. (A full story, complete with picture and tribute appeared under a byline—not Voll's—in the final edition.)

As he considered, he saw more clearly the sharp limits to what he could do. The grandiose schemes generated so spontaneously had to be discarded, or long postponed, or approached obliquely. He could not write, RUSSIANS TO DISARM; GIVE UP UN VETO. Any such dispatch would have to come in through the press services, not the city desk. The best he could do was nibble: LOCAL INVENTOR CLAIMS DEFENSE AGAINST H BOMB and VISITING DIGNITARY SAYS NO WAR THIS CENTURY.

Whether the local Edisons and junketing senators he thus called into being had sufficient substance to make the inventions and prophecies he attributed to them real enough to put the first in operation and make the second come true was something which might not be known for years. It might be more practical to find already existent inventors and statesmen—assuming there were such in the area covered by the *Gazette*—and build them up into world stature. Through them he could transcend the limitations imposed on his gift. He began an intensive study of old issues of the paper.

Meanwhile he used his power as best he could. A bill providing a civic housing project for low income families, long tabled by the city council, was signed into law, a much lower bid than the most scrupulous estimate was tendered, and work began with startling speed. The local utilities companies, to their surprise, read in the *Gazette* that their rates had been cut ten percent, and found the directives and publicity releases in their own files.

Unhappy couples, whose domestic troubles were news one day, were tranquilly reconciled the next. Victims of lingering illnesses—as soon as their condition was recognized in print—enjoyed sudden cures. A judge, notorious for his boast of throwing the book at anyone who came into his court, developed an understanding mercy. Strikes which had dragged on hopelessly for months were abruptly

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settled by granting the union demands. All local broadcasting stations agreed to a firm policy of limiting commercials to thirty seconds out of each hour, eliminating serials, and devoting non-simultaneous time, the equivalent of a full day between them, to eighteenth century music.

IV

VOLL'S researches into the *Gazette* files turned up three prospects for use in his larger purpose. One Gilbert Pinckny, a chemist, had been written up respectfully for his work with a premium motor fuel, and then with scarcely veiled derision for his wild theories of the utopia bound to be realized in the coming chemical age.

In contrast, Dr. Winterhalter, a marine biologist, was always treated neutrally by the *Gazette*, which reserved a tone just short of slander for a faith-healer and "self-styled metaphysician" by the name of Ahasuerus Smith.

Without actually misrepresenting himself as a reporter, Voll interviewed all three for "background material." He soon understood Pinckny's bad press, for the chemist was garrulous to the point of exhausting his hearer. However his talkativeness seemed to spring from a strong concern for humanity and an irrepressible enthusiasm for his work in which—Voll guessed—he was extremely competent.

Dr. Winterhalter spoke in terse syllables and cryptic allusions. Voll gathered that icthyology was a bad word in the doctor's vocabulary. His specialty was marine vegetation, and he had considerable interest in plankton; fish, crustaceans, and aquatic mammals he despised as parasitic intruders into his otherwise peaceful domain. Evidently Dr. Winterhalter's ideal world would be a completely watery one, with plankton floating and seaweed gently waving, both completely undisturbed by what he called, with a sneer, higher life forms. Chlorella and kelp were sacred to him.

Ahasuerus Smith was of a different order. At very first glance he was obviously a charlatan; the well-fed face, the expensive clothes, the lilac-flashing diamond, the sparse but well-tended beard smelling of perfume, combined into a caricature of the racketeer who preyed on susceptible women.

The greasy platitudes he uttered so smoothly revolted Voll; he was on the point of crossing the faith-healer off his list of potential instruments when Smith said, in a voice which suddenly lost its wheedling, persuasive accents and assumed a drier, lighter tone, "You are a skeptic, Mr. Voll?"

Voll, startled, muttered, "Why—I have an open mind, I hope."

Smith shrugged. "Open minds are open on both ends and consequently empty. I wasn't talking of that. The skeptic is ready to listen always; to examine, weigh, measure, question even the most

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cherished beliefs. He has no credulity. He does not believe the sun will rise tomorrow just because it rose yesterday, nor that the sky is blue just because it appears blue, or that death is real because it seems so."

"Death is very real."

"How do you know? Because you fear it? No, I see you don't. Evidently someone you loved died—a long time ago, I'd guess. Is that proof? No, wait. You believe death is real because you take it for granted life is real; you predicate one on the other. Credulous man."

Voll smiled. Smith was a cleverer charlatan than he had thought. "I'm ready to concede that matter is an illusion—philosophically."

"What does 'philosophically' mean? That you accept a formula because it ends discussion. A convinced materialist would accept the diametrically opposite formula for the same reason. Certainly, matter is an illusion, but there is not one uniform state to be arbitrarily labeled illusion. A skeptic recognizes degrees of illusion when they are shown to him. For instance—an absurdly shallow example—look at me."

Prepared for some well-managed quackery, Voll was not too startled to see the florid complexion turn sallow, the fleshy cheeks sink into hollows, the sparse beard become even thinner and ragged, the gross body dwindle and hunch, the veiled eyes grow bright and compelling. Instead of the fake, he thought wryly, there stood the fakir. Cheap hypnotism.

Yet there were potentialities in Smith. Suppose he did deceive those who would find purer demonstrations too hard? Hadn't nearly all prophets resorted to tricks and miracles to bring their message home? Definitely he could use Ahasuerus Smith. And the man had given him a glimpse of part of what might lie behind his own gift. Philosophically, time as well as matter was illusory. Might not his rewrites which turned out to be "true" be simply intuitive glimpses of things to come? Incidents of prophecy were curiously scattered through history. Perhaps, instead of the stories creating the events—

He rejected the theory even as it formed. Baker, yes; Beatty, yes; his legacy, possibly. Also Goodgins' resignation. But not for the utilities companies about-face or the other bizarre happenings, all so completely foreign to logical pattern. The cumulative evidence was overwhelming. Unless there were a force outside himself reshaping destinies, and he was merely tuned to it and allowed to forecast its decisions.

He would not accept this either. It might be pride making him refuse demotion but he preferred to think reason excluded any explanation involving two apparent impossibilities until all answers embracing only one had been discarded. By some means unexplained but not inexplicable, he had acquired

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the ancient power of the word which to all appearances suspended the laws of nature (Smith implied that there were no laws of nature) as the ancient miracle-workers had. Or there was the possibility of telekinesis; if you could move dice by thought power, why not human action?

The troubling questions did not slow his plans. A brief item mentioned that Gilbert Pinckny was working on a project to convert seawater by a radically new method. Another noted Dr. Winterhalter's proposal to prepare algae for human consumption so economically that it could be gathered, dried, packed and shipped to Asia for less than the cost of rice grown there. A third said simply that Ahasuerus Smith, "the metaphysical experimenter" intended to demonstrate that some of the classical miracles could be accomplished even in the present material age by means of little understood psychic forces.

V

VOLL NOTED with satisfaction how papers from all over picked up the Winterhalter story. An article, *Plenty For All From the Sea?* appeared in the POST and—in slightly longer form—READER'S DIGEST. LIFE ran two pages of seaweed photographs and some microscopic slides of plankton, all in color. Interest even doubled back to the *Gazette,* which printed a dignified editorial, "The Answer to Malthus."

He was less happy over his other maneuvers. Pinckny was generally dismissed as a crank trying to invade the legitimate publicity earned by the slow and careful researches of more academic scientists who would eventually solve the problem he was tackling so brashly. As for Ahasuerus Smith, he was ignored except for a few satiric comments (a new character, Nebuchadnezzar Jones, appeared in Lil Abner), and some stern admonitions about blasphemy and good taste.

Nettled, Voll wrote in rapid succession stories which appeared under these heads: FAITH HEALER MAKES "DRY" WELL GUSH; HEALER DEMONSTRATES LEVITATION TO SCIENTISTS; TELEPORTATION ALLEGEDLY ACHIEVED; "MIRACLE MAN" WALKS ON WATER, EMERGES DRY-SHOD, SAY ONLOOKERS. He realized how right had been Smith's classification of skeptics and the credulous, when these feats, carefully authenticated, were either blandly ignored or denounced as frauds.

Turning back to Pinckny, Voll was emboldened by his mounting success to skip many steps in the build-up of the chemist's invention. He announced, first, that Pinckny had taken out a patent on his process, and second, that the French government was negotiating for its use in reclaiming the Sahara.

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He had a momentary nervousness about this: could a story in the *Gazette*, even if it were picked up and relayed by the wire services, influence a French cabinet—and retroactively at that?

It did, and Gilbert Pinckny's picture, the brand new ribbon of the Legion d'honneur in his lapel, the portrait roguishly embellished with benevolent gremlins pouring streams of fresh water from cornucopias, appeared on the cover of *Time*. Inside, though primarily concerned with human interest, the editors allowed themselves a single paragraph of enthusiastic foresight.

The tensions of the Near East and North Africa, they prophesied, would disappear in a generation, as soon as their arable waste spaces were irrigated; the great Australian deserts would become lush as Ireland; half of China's six hundred million could find living space in the Gobi. Pinckny's process might mean the end of war if—here *Time*'s optimism suddenly deflated—if its benefits could be realized immediately instead of forty or fifty years hence.

Here Dr. Winterhalter came in. His plankton could feed China and Japan, his algae India; the food could be paid for in the immense amount of labor needed to construct the conversion and pumping plants, the canals, pipelines, dams and reservoirs for the Pinckny process. More than ever Voll wished he could write AP dispatches. But as it was, he could only hope political ambition or economic greed would not upset his plans, that the Communist world would be too busy developing its own areas with the Pinckny process and fattening its workers and peasants with Dr. Winterhalter's high protein products to embark on new conquests and that the Asians and Arabs, once their hunger pains were stayed, would reject totalitarianism.

He hoped landowners would relax their grip when they saw they no longer held monopolies and that the producers and capitalists of the free world would understand how global plenty was more to their advantage than tariffs, shortages and surpluses. He had, he hoped, done all he could to set events in motion to make it difficult for human nature to thwart his arrangements. Short of announcing his acceptance of a highly sensitive job with one of the press services—a step he dared not take for fear his powers were tied to the *Gazette* alone—he could do no more.

If the use to which he put Ahasuerus Smith seemed on a smaller scale, within it lay a tremulous hope he dared not yet admit even to himself. Referred to simply as the miracle worker—without scornful quotation marks—the miracles Smith performed were no longer simply spectacular. Often taking place at long distance, they relieved conditions later to be cured by Pinckny and Dr. Winterhalter,

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or removed obstacles to their work.

Smog was dissipated, deformities and mental illnesses were cured in mass demonstrations. Disasters were averted or minimized at the last moment; suicides had sudden changes of heart, conversion overtook men of wickedness or avarice and those who, through mistaken self-sacrifice, threatened needless unhappiness to others and lowered human dignity.

Now that he had outlined his grand design and seen the first promising results (DICTATOR QUITS: SAYS UNABLE TO COERCE WELL — FED.) — (GUERILLAS ACCEPT TRUCE AS GOVERNMENT DISTRIBUTES FOOD)—(DUSTBOWL'S SUBMARGINAL LANDS TO BE REFORESTED), Voll allowed himself, hesitantly at first, and then with a rush of longing, to dream again. But this was no wistful, aching dream, helped and shaped and limited by whiskey. It was a breathless, awesome hope of revoking the irrevocable and recovering the irretrievable.

He had come little by little to accept the reality of his power, but now, as he prepared to put it to the ultimate test, the old doubts returned. Yet every story he had gotten into the *Gazette* had become fact; logic assured him that this most marvellous of all could come true also.

He found he was shaking as he struck the typewriter keys, hurrying and at the same time holding back, though this was only the preliminary story, the ground breaker. But in writing it he was starting the greatest adventure of all. "Jess . . . Jessie . . ." he prayed as the short paragraph unfolded.

Miracle-working Ahasuerus Smith said today he would undertake the most momentous demonstration of his spectacular career. Sometime tomorrow Smith will try to raise the dead back to life. For obvious reasons, details of time, place, and subject cannot be made public at this time. However Smith—

His heart pounded wildly. Having sent the copy to the composing room, he was unable to control his frantic urgency. He could not possibly wait for tomorrow to write the story which would change the world for him, which would wipe out all the wasted, hopeless years. It could do no harm to write the story and leave it in the drawer. He could send it in as soon as he came to work and wait for the blessed consummation. Carefully he began to type,

Jessie Voll was brought back to life today.

He was sweating and shivering. A dull pain dragged at his chest; his breath came in gasps. In a few hours Jessie would be alive again, waiting for him to take her warm

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body in his arms. The anticipation was almost unbearable, a joy so strong it merged into agony. The overwhelming excitement made him dizzy. He put the unfinished piece in the drawer in case he should faint.

But he wasn't going to faint. "Just need air," he gasped, trying desperately to breathe the suddenly stifling and unbreathable air of the city room. He stood up, pulling open his collar to ease his closing throat and cool his burning skin. The pain in his chest sharpened, piercing his heart, killing him just as the presses finished their run on the early edition of the *Gazette* containing the first of the two stories he had written that night. It was headed:

"MIRACLE-WORKER" CLAIMS SUPERNATURAL POWER WILL RAISE DEAD, SAYS CONTROVERSIAL HEALER CLERGY PROTEST POSSIBLE SACRILEGE, ASK PROBE

The unfinished second story remained in the drawer until it was thrown away with other waste paper. Late editions of the *Gazette* did, however, have a relevant item:

NEWSMAN, WIFE, SUCCUMB

by Bert Beatty

Morgan Voll, 63, dean of the Gazette *staff, died at his city room post last night of a heart attack near the desk where he had worked for more than 30 years. At almost the same moment, at their home of the last 20 years, 2117 Washington Ave., his wife Jessie, 54, also died of heart failure.*

The Volls celebrated their 35th anniversary only last month. Noted for their romantic devotion, the couple gave as their recipe for happy marriage, "Being together every possible moment and remember—

Two days later the following communication appeared on the letter page:

Editor, The Gazette

Damaging to my reputation was the paragraph about me under a misleading if not libelous headline. Your story was false. To raise the dead would require the use of such tremendous spiritual power that its exertion would undoubtedly kill anyone making the attempt.

Ahasuerus Smith

Morgan Voll could hardly have known that his last story for the *Gazette* would do a little more than raise his wife from the grave. He could hardly have known that it would link her to himself in a time frame which depicted her as never having died. But how else *could* her resurrection have been made plausible to the world? In restoring her in the flesh to the "might have been" pattern of both their lives he did indeed exert tremendous spiritual power—and quite naturally ceased to draw breath.

Thus do miracles confound the wisest of men.

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absolutely inflexible

by . . . Robert Silverberg

It's never really safe to go skating on the quicksands of Time. But Mahler was determined to execute a complete letter Y.

THE DETECTOR over in one corner of Mahler's little office gleamed a soft red. With a weary gesture of his hand he drew it to the attention of the sad-eyed time-jumper who sat slouched glumly across the desk from him, looking cramped and uncomfortable in his bulky spacesuit.

"You see," Mahler said, tapping his desk. "They've just found another one. We're constantly bombarded with you people. When you get to the Moon, you'll find a whole Dome full of them. I've sent over four thousand there myself since I took over the Bureau. And that was over eight years ago—in twenty-seven twenty-six, to be exact. An average of five hundred a year. Hardly a day goes by without someone dropping in on us."

"And not one has been set free," the time-jumper said. "Every time-traveler who's come here has been packed off to the Moon immediately. Every single one."

"Every one," Mahler agreed. He peered through the thick shielding, trying to see what sort of man was hidden inside the spacesuit.

We have never been seriously disturbed by the paradox of the man who went back into the past and killed his own grandfather, thus making time-travel as inconceivable as a journey to the South Pole on the back of a whale. Robert Silverberg will have no truck with such nonsense and when we read this story we could understand why. A real time-traveler just wouldn't have a grandfather. He'd come out of nowhere and end up—his own worst enemy!

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Mahler often wondered about the men he condemned so easily to the Moon. This one was small of stature, with wispy locks of white hair pasted to his high forehead by perspiration. Evidently he had been a scientist, a respected man of his time, perhaps a happy father—although very few of the time-jumpers were family men. Perhaps he possessed some bit of scientific knowledge which would be invaluable to the 28th Century. Or perhaps he didn't. It scarcely mattered. Like all the rest, he would have to be sent to the Moon, to live out his remaining days under the grueling, primitive conditions of the Dome.

"Don't you think that's a little cruel?" the other asked. "I came here with no malice, no intent to harm anyone. I'm simply a scientific observer from the past. Driven by curiosity, I took the Jump. I never expected that I'd be walking into life imprisonment."

"I'm sorry," Mahler said, getting up.

He decided to end the interview then and there. He had to get rid of this jumper because there was another space-traveler coming right up. Some days they came thick and fast, and this looked like one of the really bad days. But the efficient mechanical tracers never missed a jumper.

"But can't I live on Earth and stay in this spacesuit?" the man asked, panicky now that he saw his interview with Mahler was coming to an end. "That way I'd be sealed off from contact at all times."

"Please don't make this any harder than it is for me," Mahler said. "I've explained to you why we must be absolutely inflexible. There cannot—must not—be any exceptions. Two centuries have now passed since the last outbreak of disease on Earth. So naturally we've lost most of the resistance acquired over the countless generations when disease was rampant. I'm risking my life coming so close to you, even with the spacesuit sealing you off."

Mahler signaled to the tall, powerful guards who were waiting in the corridor, looking like huge, heavily armored beetles in the casings that protected them from infection. This was always the worst moment.

"Look," Mahler said, frowning with impatience. "You're a walking death-trap. You probably carry enough disease germs to kill half the world. Even a cold—a *common* cold—would wipe out millions now. Acquired immunity to disease has simply vanished over the past two centuries. It's no longer needed, with all diseases conquered. But you time-travelers show up loaded with potentialities for all the diseases that once wiped out whole populations. And we can't risk having you stay here with them."

"But I'd—"

"I know. You'd swear by all

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that's holy to you or to me that you'd never leave the confines of the spacesuit. Sorry. The word of the most honorable man doesn't carry any weight against the safety of two billion human lives. We can't take the slightest risk by letting you stay on Earth.

"I know. It's unfair, it's cruel—it's anything else you may choose to call it. You had no idea you would walk into a situation like this. Well, I feel sorry for you. But you knew you were going on a one-way trip to the future, and would be subject to whatever that future might decide to do with you. You knew that you could not possibly return in time to your own age."

Mahler began to tidy up the papers on his desk with a brusqueness that signaled finality. "I'm terribly sorry, but you'll just have to try to understand our point of view," he said. "We're frightened to death by your very presence here. We can't allow you to roam Earth, even in a spacesuit. No. There's nothing for you but the Moon. I have to be absolutely inflexible. Take him away," he said, gesturing to the guards.

They advanced on the little man and began gently to ease him out of Mahler's office.

Mahler sank gratefully into the pneumochair and sprayed his throat with laryngogel. These long speeches always left him exhausted, and now his throat felt raw and scraped. *Someday I'll get throat cancer from all this talking,* Mahler thought. *And that'll mean the nuisance of an operation. But if I don't do this job, someone else will have to.*

Mahler heard the protesting screams of the time-jumper impassively. In the beginning he had been ready to resign on first witnessing the inevitable frenzied reaction of jumper after jumper as the guards dragged them away. But eight years had hardened him.

They had given him the job because he had been a hard man in the first place. It was a job that called for a hard man. Condrin, his predecessor, had not been the same sort of man at all, and because of his tragic weakness Condrin was now himself on the Moon. He had weakened after heading the Bureau a year, and had let a jumper go.

The jumper had promised to secrete himself at the tip of Antarctica and Condrin, thinking that Antarctica would be as safe as the Moon, had foolishly released him. Right after that they had called Mahler in. In eight years Mahler had sent four thousand men to the Moon. The first had been the runaway jumper — intercepted in Buenos Aires after he had left a trail of disease down the hemisphere from Appalachia to the Argentine Protectorate. The second had been Condrin.

It was getting to be a tiresome job, Mahler thought. But he was proud to hold it and be in a posi-

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tion to save millions of lives. It took a strong man to do what he was doing. He leaned back and awaited the arrival of the next jumper.

Instead, the door slid smoothly open, and the burly body of Dr. Fournet, the Bureau's chief medical man, broke the photoelectric beam. Mahler glanced up. Fournet carried a time-rig dangling from one hand.

"I took this away from our latest customer," Fournet said. "He told the medic who examined him that it was a two-way rig, and I thought you'd better be the first to look it over."

Mahler came to full attention quickly. A two-way rig? Unlikely, he thought. But if it was true it would mean the end of the dreary jumper-prison on the Moon. Only how could a two-way rig exist? He reached out and took the rig from Fournet.

"It seems to be a conventional twenty-fourth century type," he said.

"But notice the extra dial," Fournet said, frowning.

Mahler peered and nodded. "Yes. It *seems* to be a two-way rig, all right. But how can we test it? And it's not really very probable," he added. "Why should a two-way rig suddenly show up from the twenty-fourth Century, when no other traveler has one? We don't even have two-way time-travel ourselves, and our scientists insist that we never will.

"Still," he mused, "it's a nice thing to dream about. We'll have to study this a little more closely. But I don't seriously think it will work. Bring the jumper in, will you?"

As Fournet turned to signal the guards, Mahler asked him, "What's the man's medical report, by the way?"

"From here to here," Fournet said somberly. "You name it, he's carrying it. Better get him shipped off to the Moon as quickly as you can. I won't feel safe until he's off this planet."

The big medic waved to the guards.

Mahler smiled. Fournet's overcautiousness was proverbial in the Bureau. Even if a jumper were to show up completely free from disease, Fournet would probably insist that he was carrying everything from asthma to leprosy.

The guards brought the jumper into Mahler's office. He was fairly tall, Mahler saw—and quite young. It was difficult to see his face clearly through the dim plate of the protective spacesuit which all jumpers were compelled to wear. But Mahler could tell that the young time-traveler's face had much of the lean, hard look of Mahler's own. It was just possible that the jumper's eyes had widened in surprise as he entered the office, but Mahler could not be sure.

"I never dreamed I'd find *you* here," the jumper said. The transmitter of the spacesuit brought the young man's voice over deeply and

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resonantly. "Your name is Mahler, isn't it?"

"That's right," Mahler conceded.

"To go all these years—and find *you*. Talk about wild improbabilities!"

Mahler ignored him, declining to take up the challenge. He had found it to be good practice never to let a captured jumper get the upper hand in conversation. His standard procedure was firmly to explain to the jumper just why it was imperative for him to be sent to the Moon, and then to summon the guards as quickly as possible.

"You say this is a two-way time-rig?" Mahler asked, holding up the flimsy-looking piece of equipment.

"That's right," the other agreed. "It works both ways. If you pressed the button you'd go straight back to the year two thousand, three hundred and sixty, or thereabouts."

"Did you build it?"

"Me? No, hardly," said the jumper. "I found it. It's a long story and I don't have time to tell it now. In fact, if I tried to tell it I'd only make things ten times worse than they are. No. Let's get this over with as quickly as we can, shall we? I know I don't stand much of a chance with you, and I'd just as soon make it quick."

"You know, of course, that this is a world without disease—" Mahler began sonorously.

"And that you think I'm carrying enough germs of different sorts to wipe out the whole world. And therefore you have to be absolutely inflexible with me. All right. I won't try to argue with you. Which way is the Moon?"

Absolutely inflexible. The phrase Mahler had used so many times, the phrase that summed him up so neatly! He chuckled to himself. Some of the younger technicians must have tipped the jumper off about the usual procedure, and the jumper had resigned himself to going peacefully, without bothering to plead. It was just as well.

Absolutely inflexible.

Yes, Mahler thought, the words fitted him well. He was becoming a stereotype in the Bureau. Perhaps he was the only Bureau Chief who had never relented, and let a jumper go. Probably all of the others, bowed under the weight of hordes of curious men flooding in from the past, had finally cracked and taken the risk.

But not Mahler—not Absolutely Inflexible Mahler. He took pride in the deep responsibility that rode on his shoulders, and had no intention of evading a sacred trust. His job was to find the jumpers and get them off Earth as quickly and as efficiently as possible. Every single one. It was a task that required relentless inflexibility.

"This makes my job much easier," Mahler said. "I'm glad I won't have to convince you that I am simply doing my duty."

"Not at all," the other said. "I understand. I won't even waste my breath. The task you must carry out

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is understandable, and I cannot hope to make you change your mind." He turned to the guards. "I'm ready. Take me away."

Mahler gestured to them, and they led the jumper away. Amazed, Mahler watched the retreating figure, studying him until he could no longer be seen.

If they were all like that, Mahler thought. *I could have gotten to like that one. He was a sensible man—one of the few. He knew he was beaten, and he didn't try to argue in the face of absolute necessity. It's too bad he had to go. He's the kind of man I'd like to find more often these days. But I mustn't feel sympathy. That would be unwise.*

Mahler had succeeded as an administrator only because he had managed to suppress any sympathy for the unfortunates he had been compelled to condemn. Had there been any other place to send them —back to their own time, preferably—he would have been the first to urge abolition of the Moon prison. But, with only one course of action open to him he performed his job efficiently and automatically.

He picked up the jumper's time-rig and examined it. A two-way rig would be the solution, of course. As soon as the jumper arrived, a new and better policy would be in force, turning him around and sending him back. They'd get the idea quickly enough. Mahler found himself wishing it could be so; he often wondered what the jumpers stranded on the Moon must think of him.

A two-way rig would change the world so completely that its implications would be staggering. With men able to move at will backward and forward in time the past, present, and future would blend into one broad and shining highway. It was impossible to conceive of the world as it might be, with free passage in either direction.

But even as Mahler fondled the confiscated time-rig he realized that something was wrong. In the six centuries since the attainment of time-travel, no one had yet developed a known two-way rig. And an unknown rig was pretty well ruled out. There were no documented reports of visitors from the future and presumably, if such a rig existed, such visitors would have been as numerous as were the jumpers from the past.

So the young man had been lying, Mahler thought with regret. The two-way rig was an utter impossibility. The youth had merely been playing a game with his captors. There *couldn't* be a two-way rig, because the past had never been in any way influenced by the future.

Mahler examined the rig. There were two dials on it—the conventional forward dial and another indicating backward travel. Whoever had prepared the incredible hoax had gone to considerable trouble to document it. *Why?*

Could it be that the jumper had been telling the truth? Mahler

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wished that he could somehow test the rig immediately. There was always the one slim chance that it might actually work, and that he would no longer have to be a rigid dispenser of justice. Absolutely Inflexible Mahler!

He looked at it. As a time machine, it was fairly crude. It made use of the standard distorter pattern, but the dial was the clumsy wide-range 24th-century one. The vernier system, Mahler reflected, had not been introduced until the 25th century.

Mahler peered closer to read the instruction label. PLACE LEFT HAND HERE, it said. He studied it carefully. The ghost of a thought wandered into his mind. He pushed it aside in horror, but it recurred. It would be so simple. What if he should—

No.

But—

PLACE LEFT HAND HERE.

He reached out tentatively with his left hand.

Be careful now. No sense in being reckless—

PLACE LEFT HAND HERE.

PRESS DIAL.

He placed his left hand lightly on the indicated place. There was a little crackle of electricity. He let go, quickly, and started to replace the time-rig when the desk abruptly faded out from under him.

THE AIR WAS foul and grimy. Mahler wondered what had happened to the Conditioner. Then he looked around.

Huge, grotesque, ugly buildings blocked out most of the sky. There were dark oppressive clouds of smoke overhead, and the harsh screech of an industrial society assailed his ears.

He was in the middle of an immense city, and streams of people were rushing past him at a furious pace. They were all small, stunted creatures, their faces harried, and neurotic. They all had the same despairing, frightened look. It was an expression Mahler had seen many times on the faces of jumpers escaping from an unendurable nightmare world to a more congenial future.

He stared down at the time-rig clutched in his hand, and knew what had happened. The two-way rig!

It meant the end of the Moon prisons. It meant a complete revolution in civilization. But he had no desire to remain in so oppressive and horrible an age a minute longer than was necessary. He reached down to activate the time-rig.

Abruptly someone jolted him from behind and the current of the crowd swept him along. He was struggling desperately to regain control over himself when a hand reached out and gripped the back of his neck.

"Got a card, Hump?" a harsh voice demanded.

He whirled to face an ugly,

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squinting-eyed man in a dull-brown uniform.

"Did you hear what I said? Where's your card, Hump? Talk up or you get Spotted."

Mahler twisted out of the man's grasp and started to jostle his way quickly through the crowd, desiring nothing more than an opportunity to set the time-rig and get out of this disease-ridden, squalid era forever. As he shoved people out of his way they shouted angrily and tried to trip him, raining blows on his back and shoulders.

"There's a Hump!" someone called. "Spot him!"

The cry became a roar. "Spot him! Spot him! Spot him!"

He turned left and went pounding down a side street, and now it was a full-fledged mob that dashed after him, shouting in savage fury.

"Send for the Crimers!" a deep voice boomed. "They'll Spot him!"

A running man caught up to him and in sheer desperation Mahler swung about and let fly with his fists. He heard a dull grunt of pain, but he did not pause in his headlong flight. The unaccustomed exercise was tiring him rapidly.

An open door beckoned, and he hurried swiftly toward it.

An instant later he was inside a small furniture shop and a salesman was advancing toward him. "Can I help you, sir? The latest models, right here."

"Just leave me alone," Mahler panted, squinting at the time-rig.

The salesman stared uncomprehendingly as Mahler fumbled with the little dial.

There was no vernier. He'd have to chance it and hope to hit the right year. The salesman suddenly screamed and came to life—for reasons Mahler would never understand.

Mahler ignored him and punched the stud viciously.

It was wonderful to step back into the serenity of 28th-Century Appalachia. It was small wonder so many time-jumpers came to so peaceful an age, Mahler reflected, as he waited for his overworked heart to calm down. Almost anything would be preferable to *back there.*

He looked up and down the quiet street, seeking a Convenience where he could repair the scratches and bruises he had acquired during his brief stay in the past. They would scarcely be able to recognize him at the Bureau in his present battered condition, with one eye nearly closed, and a great livid welt on his cheek.

He sighted one at last and started down the street, only to be brought up short by the sound of a familiar soft mechanical whining. He looked around to see one of the low-running mechanical tracers of the Bureau purring up the street toward him. It was closely followed by two Bureau guards, clad in their protective casings.

Of course! He had arrived from

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the past, and the detectors had recorded his arrival, just as they would have pin-pointed any time-traveler. They never missed.

He turned, and walked toward the guards. He failed to recognize them, but this did not surprise him. The Bureau was a vast and wide-ranging organization, and he knew only a handful of the many guards who customarily accompanied the tracers. It was a pleasant relief to see the tracer. The use of tracers had been instituted during his administration, and he was absolutely sure now that he hadn't returned too early along the time stream.

"Good to see you," he called to the approaching guards. "I had a little accident in the office."

They ignored him, and began methodically to unpack a spacesuit from the storage trunk of the mechanical tracer.

"Never mind talking," one said. "Get into this."

He paled. "But I'm no jumper," he protested. "Hold on a moment, fellows. This is all a terrible mistake. I'm Mahler—head of the Bureau. *Your boss.*"

"Don't play games with us, chum," the taller guard said, while the other forced the spacesuit down over Mahler's shoulders. To his horror, Mahler saw that they did not recognize him at all.

"Suppose you just come peacefully and let the Chief explain everything to you, without any trouble," the short guard said.

"But I *am* the Chief," Mahler protested. "I was examining a two-way time-rig in my office and accidentally sent myself back to the past. Take this thing off me and I'll show you my identification card. That should convince you."

"Look, chum, we don't want to be convinced of anything. Tell it to the Chief, if you like. Now, are you coming—or do we bring you?"

There was no point, Mahler decided, in trying to prove his identity to the clean-faced young medic who examined him at the Bureau office. To insist on an immediate identification would only add more complications. No. It would be far better to wait until he reached the office of the Chief.

He knew now what had happened. Apparently he had landed somewhere in his own future, shortly after his own death. Someone else had taken over the Bureau, and he, Mahler had been forgotten. He suddenly realized with a little shock that at that very moment his ashes were probably reposing in an urn at the Appalachia Crematorium.

When he got to the Chief of the Bureau, he would simply and calmly explain exactly what had happened and ask for permission to go back ten or twenty or thirty years to the time in which he belonged. Once there, he could turn the two-way rig over to the proper authorities and resume his life from his point of departure. When that happened, the jumpers would no

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longer be sent to the Moon, and there would be no further need for Inflexible Mahler.

But, he suddenly realized, if he'd already done that why was there still a clearance Bureau. An uneasy fear began to grow in him.

"Hurry up and finish that report," Mahler told the medic.

"I don't know what the rush is," the medic complained. "Unless you like it on the Moon."

"Don't worry about me," Mahler said confidently. "If I told you who I am, you'd think twice about—"

"Is this thing your time-rig?" the medic asked unexpectedly.

"Not really. I mean—yes, yes it is," Mahler said. "And be careful with it. It's the world's only two-way rig."

"Really, now!" said the medic. "Two ways, eh?"

"Yes. And if you'll take me to your Chief—"

"Just a minute. I'd like to show this to the Head Medic."

In a few moments the medic returned. "All right, we'll go to the Chief now. I'd advise you not to bother arguing with him. You can't win. You should have stayed in your own age."

Two guards appeared and jostled Mahler down the familiar corridor to the brightly-lit little office where he had spent eight years of his life. Eight years on the other side of the fence!

As he approached the room that had once been his office, he carefully planned what he would say to his successor. He would explain the accident first, of course. Then he would establish his identity beyond any possibility of doubt and request permission to use the two-way rig to return to his own time. The Chief would probably be belligerent at first. But he'd quickly enough become curious, and finally amused at the chain of events that had ensnarled Mahler.

And, of course, he would make amends, after they had exchanged anecdotes about the job they both held at the same time across a wide gap of years. Mahler vowed that he would never again touch a time machine, once he got back. He would let others undertake the huge job of transmitting the jumpers back to their own eras.

He moved forward and broke the photoelectric beam. The door to the Bureau Chief's office slid open. Behind the desk sat a tall, powerfully built man with hard gray eyes.

Me!

Through the dim plate of the spacesuit into which he had been stuffed, Mahler stared in stunned horror at the man behind the desk. It was impossible for him to doubt that he was gazing at Inflexible Mahler, the man who had sent four thousand men to the Moon, without exception, in the unbending pursuit of his duty.

And if he's Mahler—

Who am I?

Suddenly Mahler saw the insane circle complete. He recalled the

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jumper, the firm, deep-voiced, unafraid time-jumper who had arrived claiming to have a two-way rig and who had marched off to the Moon without arguing. Now Mahler knew who that strange jumper was.

But how did the cycle start? Where had the two-way rig come from in the first place? He had gone to the past to bring it to the present to take it to the past to—

His head swam. There was no way out. He looked at the man behind the desk and began to walk slowly toward him, feeling a wall of circumstance growing up around him, while in frustration, he tried impotently to beat his way out.

It was utterly pointless to argue. Not with Absolutely Inflexible Mahler. It would just be a waste of breath. The wheel had come full circle, and he was as good as on the Moon already. He looked at the man behind the desk with a new, strange light in his eyes.

"I never dreamed I'd find you here," the jumper said. The transmitter of the spacesuit brought the jumper's voice over deeply and resonantly.

A well-known financial writer with a prophetic imaginative gift makes the world of tomorrow astoundingly three-dimensional—on the strangest of terror-shadowed, "might have been" worlds.

ATTACK FROM WITHIN

By BURTON CRANE

Thousands of light years from Earth cosmic titans look at reality through inscrutable eyes—and a desperate group of trapped humans discover how dangerous belligerency can be.

THE VOICELESS SENTINELS

By ROGER DEE

in the next issue

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the humming cloud

by . . . Eric Clausen

To the lonely farm dwellers the yellow flyers were evil beyond all imagination. But only one man and one woman understood why.

THE VALLEY I am lying over is purple with blooming heather. The other clouds are gray and blue and are drifting high in the late summer sky. I am yellow and I crackle like the fur of a cat in the hot sun. My tentacles sweep over the heath a mile or so in each direction. They sway up and down. It will soon be winter. I am making quick calculations about the temperature changes in the seasons.

A car drives up the gravel road which winds its way towards my heath. A man and a woman are in the car. They stop on the crest of a hill overlooking the valley. Now I place a contact cell on the windshield. They are cautious. They make certain that all the windows are closed, and the man stuffs twists of paper in the spaces between the pedals and the bottom of the car.

He has put already a fine-meshed net in the air-channel of the heater. He unpacks something. It is not a tele-camera like those the biologists bring these days when they expect

Eric Clausen is a young Danish writer whose short-stories have been featured in the magazine section of Denmark's largest newspaper and on radio drama programs in both Denmark and Sweden. Despite his youth—he is only twenty-seven—he has won considerable recognition in Scandinavian literary circles. In science fantasy there is often an indefinable magic quality which vanishes completely in translation. But here the author's individuality of style has been most skillfully preserved. The unknown comes very close, and hovers unforgettably in a nightmare realm of elusive, ' uly frightening dimensions.

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me to bury myself. This man is not a scientist. He is an artist, and it is a sketchbook he takes out of his bag.

The woman is looking for a thermo-bottle and a lunchbox. Evidently she is planning to make a picnic out of it.

"There is one of the wasps," he says, "look!"

"It looks like a lump of brass," she answers. "No—this salmon sandwich is for you."

All during the summer many people came to see me. But when the vacation period ended only a few entomologists came now and then. They are in ecstasy because a new variety of "animal life" has turned up in their country. Silica-composed, stiff wasps—thus stupidly do they refer to my cells. They wonder what the antennas are used for. They have crushed several hundred cells in a mortar and have discovered that they also contain a small amount of phosphorus. They look at the cells through microscopes and they dissect the antennas and find a trace of nervous tension in them.

Maybe it is because the artist out there is not a specialist that he is wondering along other lines. He does not see the single cells, but he looks for a connected whole. It is clear that he wants to understand the cloud before he draws it. He is thinking . . .

There will come a time when I will experiment with telepathy on human beings. Now I satisfy myself with observing their reactions and I know that many of them are afraid. But those who are in charge and decide for the others are more curious than afraid. They are the ones who have protected me and put up stop signs on all the roads leading to the valley on the heath: *"Reserved Area for Nature Study."*

Their biologists keep me protected, which means that those who are in charge have no serious suspicion of who and what I am.

I knew beforehand that it would happen this way. The ones who must decide are self-confident—and those who obey are afraid. Most of the frightened ones live on lonely farms on the heath. I often listen to what happens in their rooms.

When these people are sitting about talking together in the evening and they spot a contact cell—a yellow flyer, they call it—they fall silent. They look at it sidewise and pretend that they haven't seen it. They do not say much after that and they do not chase it. The intelligent people are amused by the superstition of the heath dwellers.

I have avoided spreading terror. It would have been most convenient to feed off the domestic animals in the fields behind the stone dam. But it might have aroused suspicion. Therefore, I have made my own Reservation—an area fifteen

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miles around my base. I require a great deal of extra energy to bring the animals from so far away.

Moreover, I have to wait until nightfall, because the sight of a tentacle catching an animal would cause fright. I need more than a hundred thousand of my cells to take the parts of a cow to my center.

Luckily there is an abundance of vegetable sustenance right here and I am using sixty tons of it a day. At first I took—besides wild and domestic animals—not a few human beings. But generally there were annoying investigations afterward. Now I take only shabby individuals who walk aimlessly along the roads. Nobody is searching for them.

It is important to avoid suspicion until the balance of power has been displaced. I made a mistake in the spring when I took a Jersey bull from his pen only four miles away. I needed nourishment in a hurry to start building the subterranean division which will house the organ of renovation — the queen, their scientists would call it. It was too early in the evening when I sent out the tentacle and a stable boy caught a glimpse of it.

He shouted something about flying yellow things taking the bull, and I had to sting him in the neck artery to prevent him from saying more. Still, this caused rumors to circulate in the villages. It was fortunate that the heath dwellers did not manage to have the Reserved Area signs taken away. The State Board of Research is my best protector.

In the beginning I was lying sheltered and alone in the valley where I did my excavating. The sand is fine and dry for a depth of twenty yards. It is somewhat too fine-grained, and it slides easily. But I made extra reinforcements along the corridors which served at the same time for insulation. This material is made of pulp from the heather plants. The queen's cave is lined with heather pulp mixed with resin and wool.

Later on I made a dam across a brook and created a water reservoir. This served a double purpose: I received a permanent supply of water and I drew the attention of the people to my existence. Previously the local population had stayed away from my valley, because they didn't like what they called the yellow insects.

The dam caused such a sensation that people all over the country were soon talking about the "beaver-wasps," and I found myself protected by the powerful ones in charge. It was what I had counted on. By that time I was already of such great size that I could not remain visibly concealed.

Human beings are so certain that they will reign over the earth throughout all eternity that they allow themselves the extravagance of pretending to give other creatures a chance to survive and flour-

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ish. They enjoy nature twice as much when they give it a little leeway. After they have built roads across the wildest mountains they actually find themselves liking the mountains.

They are so completely sure that they have no competitors. Such blindness is fortunate for me and for the others that will drift down over their lands and possessions. They will never understand in the time that remains to them because they believe they understand everything. They are not on guard.

Probably they will or they can see me only as a cloud of insects. Their own brain consists of millions of nerve cells lumped together within a narrow bone structure. They cannot imagine any thinking in a system unlike their own.

My mind goes over all this while I watch the two human beings in the closed car—while the woman says: "Salmon sandwich."

The man gulps down his coffee, keeping his eye on the corner of the windshield where I placed the contact cell. He looks at it constantly. He has no knowledge of insects, but he has imagination. He knows so little about science that the others who came here would laugh at him. He is no specialist, and his thoughts are roaming wildly, unrestrained by teaching and opinions. His thoughts form a completely mad theory—the right one. I watch him and my humming increases.

"I will call this drawing 'the humming cloud,'" he says. After a while he mutters something: "The antennas. They make the connections with the others . . ."

"You mean to say that the whole cloud is one living being? What nonsense!" His wife looks at the contact cell. "But still—"

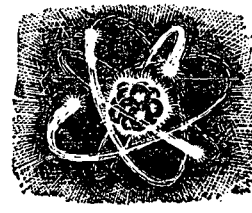
"It is conscious," he says. "They are all connected with one another like the cells in a living body."

I watch their faces and their thoughts. They will not forget the crazy, remote idea. They will certainly talk about it.

I am sending out a tentacle.

I bury the car under the road, putting every piece of gravel back in the old place. Every grain of sand is smoothed back.

I resume my calculations of winter temperatures in different layers of earth.



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universe in books

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

In a bright new array of science fantasy titles Aldous Huxley's sophisticated vision of tomorrow gently jostles an UFO report.

LORENZO SMYTHE, almost to the last, is an illustration of why Robert A. Heinlein is one of the more prolific *and* successful writers in this field. DOUBLE STAR (Doubleday, $2.95) is perhaps no more than the story of an often threatened impersonation, set in a faintly Graustarkian future (have the publishers sent an inscribed copy to the Queen of the Netherlands?), but it is a persuasive, action-filled and quite credible future.

Escapist? Undoubtedly. But in writing a novel that—in contrast to his REVOLT IN 2100 (Shasta, $3.50)—is simply aimed at those of you who want to relax, Heinlein has drawn a hard-to-beat portrait of a rather apolitical actor who suddenly finds himself contributing to Galactic history. Recommended.

ARTHUR C. CLARKE, who is to be with us as Guest of Honor at this fall's World Convention in New York, looks at the Tomorrows with rather doubting eyes in his REACH FOR TOMORROW (Ballantine, 35 cents), a new anthology of his short stories.

Now that Jackie Gleason has come out in favor of flying saucers the entire area of discussion takes on a controversial quality we'd be solely tempted to avoid—at least, if we were one of those test pilots Hans Stefan Santesson so airily refers to here. But Mr. Santesson is a flying saucer partisan, as we've pointed out before, and while we may disagree with him we're delighted to have him present his views on the subject with such sparkling conviction and verve.

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"The Awakening" takes us to a world where "the ancient war between man and insect had long ago been ended." The glaciers sweep implacably down on the last man left in London in "The Forgotten Enemy." "Jupiter Five" introduces us to the resourceful and rather British Professor Forster. "The Fires Within," while by no means a new idea, is still interesting—and a little frightening. At least, I found it so.

And we are present during the last hours of Earth in "Rescue Party." "The last that anyone was ever to see of Earth was a great plain, bathed with the silver light of the abnormally brighter moon. Across its face the waters were pouring in a glittering flood towards a distant range of mountains. The sea had won its final victory, but its triumph would be short-lived, for soon sea and land would be no more."

By the time this review appears in print you may already have seen MGM's Cinema-Scope and color production, *Forbidden Planet,* starring Walter Pidgeon and Anne Francis, the "screenplay written by Cyril Hume, from the story by Irving Black and Allen Adler." W. J. Stuart's FORBIDDEN PLANET (Bantam, 35 cents), published by Farrar, Straus and Cudahy this January, and by Bantam Books this March, is based on the screenplay and is the story of the second expedition to Altair, "the great main sequence star of the constellation Alpha Aquilae."

The expedition runs into unpleasant things on that lonely planet—strange relics left behind by the race that had lived on Altair two hundred thousand years earlier —and strange and horrible mechanisms that could not be seen while they tore shrieking people apart. Commander J. J. Adams is a stern hero in the best Cinema-Scope tradition, a veteran commander who finds time for the proper emotions. It is hard, and perhaps even unjust, to evaluate this example of what happens when MGM and the book publishers get together. But we can confidently say that this is interesting space opera in the Hollywood manner.

In Tomorrow's far-flung galaxies police will patrol the skyways, they —and those they hunt. Perhaps the humans. And perhaps not. Time and space barriers will be crossed with ease and it will be possible to anticipate many crimes before they occur. Others, those subtler conspiracies against galactic civilization which will involve a complex mastery of scientific advances will be more difficult to deal with.

SPACE POLICE, edited by Andre Norton (World, $2.75), while an anthology aimed at that theoretical teen-age reader, should interest a good many adults. Ken Crossen (Why not a novel about Inspector Jair Calder?), James Blish, H.

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Beam Piper, L. Ron Hubbard (Remember him?) and others, are responsible for interesting glimpses of a world where we either police ourselves or are policemen—while galactic agents, humanoid or otherwise, stalk ominously down dark side streets . . .

ALDOUS HUXLEY, writing on TOMORROW AND TOMORROW AND TOMORROW (Esquire, March 1956), discusses three portraits of the World of Tomorrow—a Tomorrow where we may no longer be living, to quote Mr. Huxley, "like drunken sailors, like the irresponsible heirs of a millionaire uncle. At an ever accelerating rate we are now squandering the capital of metallic ores and fossil fuels accumulated in the earth's crust during hundreds of millions of years. How long can this spending spree go on?" And when will it end? Recommended.

The Flying Saucers are with us again!

EDWARD J. RUPPELT, former head of the United States Air Force Project *Blue Book* investigating reports of Flying Saucers, contributes an authoritative addition to the mounting material on the subject with his THE REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS (Doubleday, $4.50). This book, completely based on official reports of sightings, is important and a *must* for those of you who are interested in the mildly controversial question of just what the UFO really are.

Mr. Ruppelt and his staff painstakingly studied over four thousand reports of alleged sightings—*more than four thousand reports that were subjected to military intelligence analysis procedures*—and at the close of his extremely interesting summary Mr. Ruppelt points out that there ARE reports which have not as yet been explained. "When a ground radar picks up a UFO target and a ground observer sees a light where the radar target is located, and when a jet interceptor is then scrambled to intercept the UFO, and the pilot also sees the light and gets a radar lock on only to have the UFO almost impudently outdistance him, there is no simple answer. We have no aircraft on this earth that can at will so handily outdistance our latest jets." (pp. 314-315)

As he says, "Maybe the earth is being visited by interplanetary spaceships. Only time will tell."

What is *your* nomination for the worst SF or Fantasy novel published during '55? And what was the book—or what were the books—that you liked best? They may not have been great literature—they may not have solved, or even helped to solve, anticipated problems in our feckless Tomorrows. But you liked them and thought them interesting, and that, in the final analysis, is the difference between a book which is remembered,

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and read and read again, and a book which you gulp down once, like tonight's paper, and then promptly forget.

I still think George Adamski's INSIDE THE SPACE SHIPS (Abelard-Schuman, $3.50), despite the obvious metaphysical slant of the writers and their unfortunate reliance on weak references, was one of the more interesting books I read last year. Adamski's work was a challenging "explanation" of just who and what the Intelligences are that we must assume are directing the UFO.

Vaughan Wilkins' excursion into Fantasy in his VALLEY BEYOND TIME (St. Martin's Press, $3.00) was a pleasant and literate introduction to a world many of us may wish we knew, and H. Chandler Elliott's REPRIEVE FROM PARADISE (Gnome Press, $3.00) was an extremely interesting picture of a society and a world our descendants *may* know . . . Or may never live to see.

Of course there were still others, William Tenn's OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS (Ballantine, 35 cents), John Wyndham's RE-BIRTH (Ballantine, 35 cents), James E. Gunn's rather interesting THIS FORTRESS WORLD (Gnome Press, $3.00), to mention only a few, but the list is not long.

SEVERAL of you have asked why fewer novels seem to be published these days. It is true, of course, that trade publishing's romance with the field isn't as intense as it was two, or three years ago. The reasons for this loss of enthusiasm were gone into at Cleveland and at other conferences. But at the same time we *do* see more and more Space Opera, Space Spy Opera, and anthology after anthology rub shoulders with Hemingway and Spillane on the paper book racks. One of the few to do originals, BALLANTINE BOOKS, challenges the leadership of the older specialty houses, publishing—with rare exceptions—the kind of literate, thoughtful and provocative material that justifies the field's existence. Any list of the year's best ten has to include several Ballantine titles. This fall's World Convention should thank Ian Ballantine for his contributions as a publisher to science fiction's coming of age.

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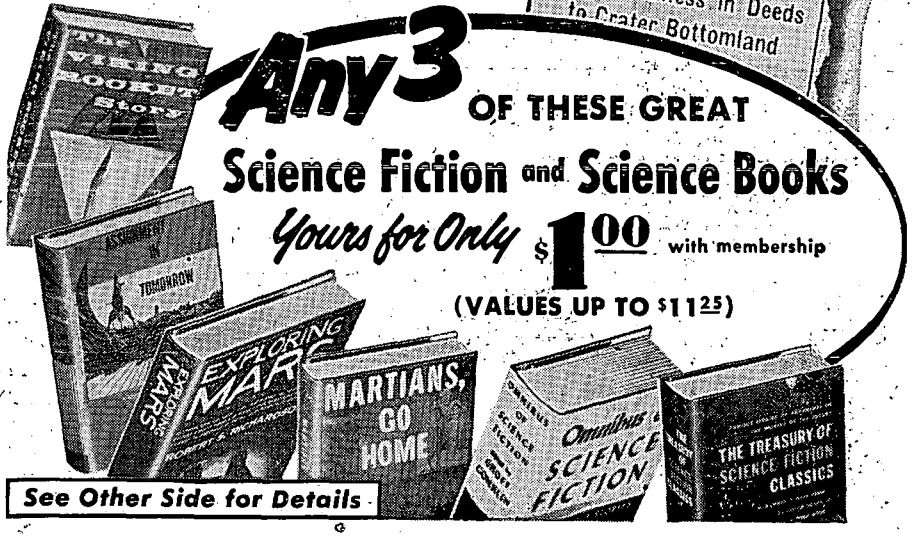

See Other Side for Details

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